THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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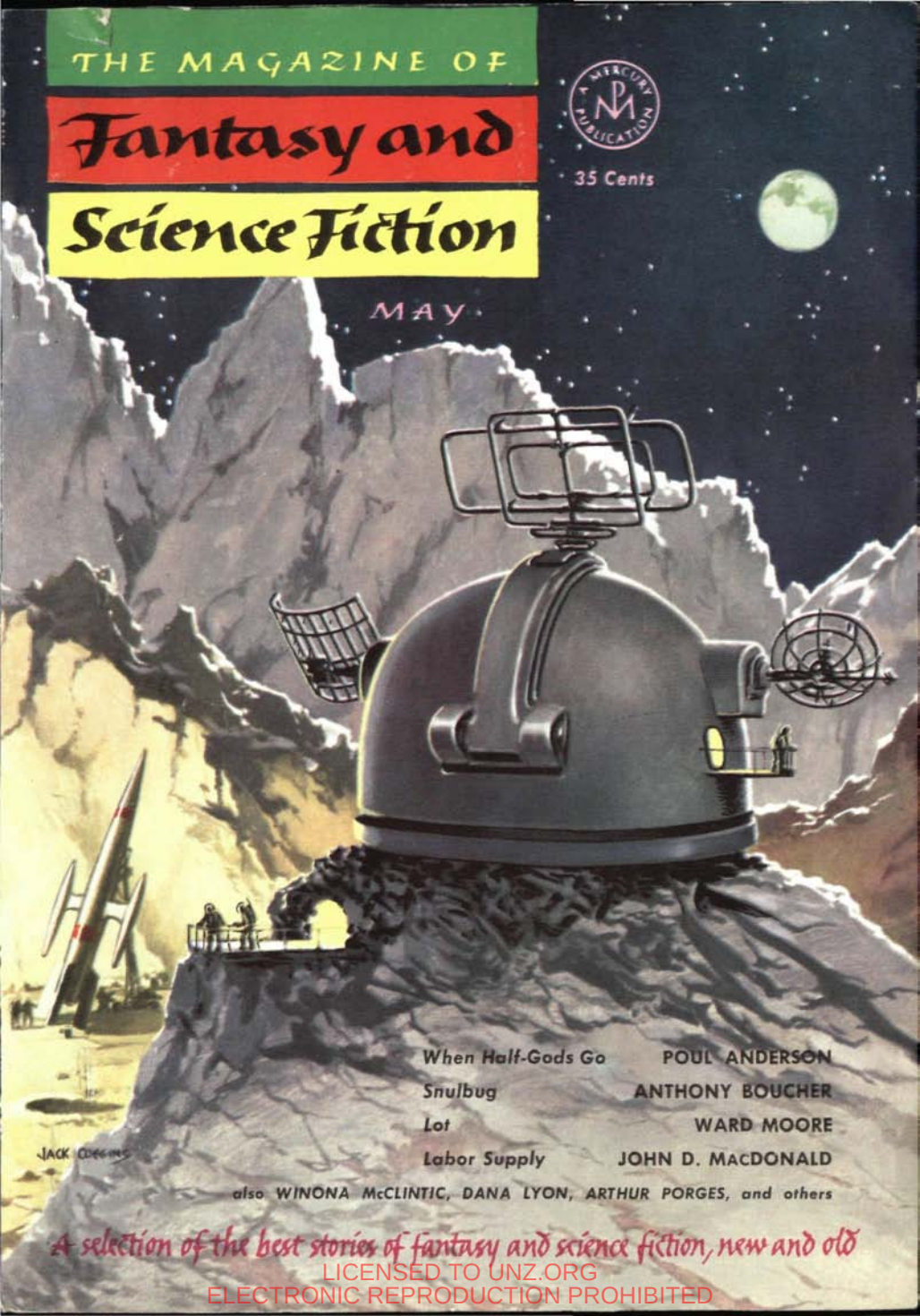

When Half-Gods Go — POUL ANDERSON

Snulbug — ANTHONY BOUCHER

Lot — WARD MOORE

Labor Supply — JOHN D. MacDONALD

also WINONA McCLINTIC, DANA LYON, ARTHUR PORGES, and others

A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 4, No. 5 MAY

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(a rocket-launching station on the moon)

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Science fiction deals largely with Utopias, but very rarely with how they come into being. They are usually presented simply as inevitable results of man's constant striving toward a better world; but supposing Utopia, the ideal world of the far future, were offered to this earth today? Would we have the sense to accept it, or even to recognize it? It is this novel problem which confronts the galactic emissaries in Mr. Anderson's new story — a problem which illustrates the fact that the most highly trained missionary may sometimes need to seek the advice of the bushman.

When Half-Gods Go

by POUL ANDERSON

MORTON, OF THE Harvard Astronomy department, knocked the dottle from his notoriously evil-smelling pipe and looked around the room. There were a dozen or so men gathered here in his home, all professors at his university and neighboring schools, all old friends who could be trusted to keep their mouths shut.

"I hope I wasn't too melodramatic," he said, "but then this whole business is so fantastic that I've long ago given up my usual standards of normality. All you know is that I called each of you up and asked you to come here tonight as discreetly as possible. Now that we're all gathered, there really isn't much more I can tell you."

His eyes traveled around the group which sat quietly smoking and sipping his brandy, and he wondered how to continue. "You remember," he went on as dryly as possible, "that a couple of weeks ago our little discussion club wrote to these *soi-disant* Sagittarians, this couple which claims to be envoys from an interstellar civilization, inviting them to come and speak. We were interested in them and their claims, we hoped to find out how they did their tricks. . . . Well, they wrote back politely saying we were too small a bunch for their purposes, and I thought that was the end of it. When they got in trouble with the law the other day and were officially denounced, I was merely disappointed. Another pair of Cagliostros, eh?

"Then yesterday afternoon they appeared in my office." Morton smiled,

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a shy smile pleading for belief. "I was sitting alone, the door was closed, and suddenly there they were. They requested me to assemble the club — such members, at least, as I knew wouldn't blab — and said they'd talk to us after all. When I agreed, they vanished again."

The astronomer shrugged. "That's it, gentlemen. Are you game?"

"Certainly," rumbled Johns, the M.I.T. cybernetics man. "For the kind of show they put on, I don't mind harboring a fugitive."

"Y'think they're the genuine article?" asked Foxxe, the British anthropologist currently on loan to Harvard.

"I don't know," said Morton. "I honestly don't know. Maybe we'll find out tonight. We're supposed to think at them simultaneously when we're ready. They're hiding somewhere nearby and will, uh, hear us. Telepathy."

"Rum go," said Foxxe. "One day they're just another show, the next they're wanted for every crime from high treason to selling peanuts without a license. I shall never understand you Americans."

"Sometimes," said Morton, "we don't understand ourselves." He looked around the shabby, comfortable room again. The shades were pulled; night lay beyond the windows. "All set? Okay, let's get on with the seance."

They thought the invitation, feeling a little silly about the whole affair. With a faint whooshing of displaced atmosphere, the Sagittarians stood among them.

There were two, and they looked quite human on the outside, an ordinariness increased by the conventional Earthly garments they wore. They had admitted to having only four toes on each foot — shoes hid that fact — and their ears lacked the intricate Terrestrial convolutions. An X-ray would have shown other differences, and a physiologist would have been surprised by a number of internal details. But all in all, the foreignness was not great. Evolution on Earth-like planets tends to follow very similar patterns.

The man, En-Shan Khorokum, was of medium height, slender and graceful, with high cheekbones and sleek black hair, olive skin and dark eyes. Chi Balkhai, his wife or equivalent thereof, had the same racial characteristics, and was lovely to look on, slim and supple as a finely bred cat. Both seemed young — ageless might be a better term, for there was a vibrant strength and aliveness in them, a depth of mature wisdom under the weary desperation of the hunted.

"Ah . . . how do you do," said Morton.

Khorokum smiled, a flash of white teeth in his mobile face, but the eyes were mostly on Chi. Voices murmured at the newcomers, greetings, good wishes. If they could really scan minds, thought Morton, they'd find here

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the friendliness they needed — a high degree of tentative acceptance of their story, with no dogmatic rejection such as had cursed them elsewhere.

He looked awkwardly around. "Please don't try to do anything special," said Chi. "We're simply old friends who have dropped in for a visit."

"Well, sit down then, sit down and have some of this brandy," bellowed Johns. "Our host keeps the best cellar this side of — what did you say your home star was called? — this side of Urukand."

"Thank you, thank you." The guests found chairs, and the professors crowded their own seats close.

"There is nothing overly melodramatic about this," said Khorokum. "My wife and I are in no danger of our lives, not when with an effort of will we can teleport ourselves off the planet altogether. But we are in a certain amount of professional jeopardy. This is our first big job as an independent team, and we'd hate to mess it up."

"You mean," said Gray, who taught history, "that there are many planets in our situation? That it's a function of your society to — convert them?"

"Well, quite a few such worlds," replied Khorokum. "You see, the Galactic Union originated in the Sagittarian star clusters about a half million years ago and has since been spreading outward, its aim being ultimately to bring all inhabited planets into itself. Urukand was civilized 10,000 years or so in the past. But it's a big job, you can readily see that, so we concentrate on worlds which have reached approximately your stage of technology. Their science is then sufficiently highly developed to understand the concepts involved, while at the same time they are far behind us and so grasp eagerly at the gifts we offer — the parapsychic powers replacing machines for all but the most routine work, the conquest of age and disease and social ills like war and poverty, membership in the glorious federation of stars — oh, it was a straightforward sort of thing till Earth came along. But there's something unique in your human psychology. You don't believe the evidence of your own senses — I wonder if you *want* a higher civilization. When our scouts reported heavy neutrino emission from your planet, Chi and I were sent on what seemed an easy mission. And we failed. We failed completely." His face twisted a little.

"Our jobs are a very small matter compared to the danger all Earth is in," said Chi softly. "Your unstable society is moving inevitably toward annihilating war and cruel tyranny. Any nation of Earth which joined the Union could no longer wage war, but it would be safe from all attack — but nobody believes that! They've seen what we can do, and still they won't believe. What we want, gentlemen, is advice."

"The savages advise the missionaries?" Van Tyne, of Boston University's English department, raised his shaggy brows.

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"You are humans and we are not," said Chi. "One of you may have the vital fact we need."

Foxxe nodded. "I always claimed that the only white men who ever really understood a primitive folk were those who went native," he said. "Trouble always was, y'know, that kind of person just doesn't write for the journals."

Khorokum leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees. "Suppose," he said, "that I give you the whole situation — from the very beginning."

At first it had seemed easy. Teleporting across a thousand light years was no more mysterious than willing your arm to move, once you understood the psychophysiological applications of wave mechanics. They took along no equipment except some small powerpacks, the size of cigaret cases, with which to equalize gravitational potentials and trigger the vast cosmic-force flows which their nervous systems could direct to control matter and energy. There had been a month or two of inconspicuous flitting about Earth and reading minds, learning the history, language, mores, filling their trained memories with the key facts. Then, quite simply, they had gone to the leaders of the important nations.

The Union was not a conqueror. That was ruled out by the relative smallness of its population in an enormous Galaxy, by a total lack of any economic necessity for tribute, and by the very structure of a society based on individual development. New planets had to join of their own free will, if they were not to become a dangerous and disruptive element in a carefully balanced civilization. Even the field agents could not exert compulsion of any sort, including hypnosis, except in self-defense; and even after a state had become a member the necessary internal changes were best carried out, gradually, by its own government. The immediate alterations ran in the direction of libertarianism, universal equality, total disarmament — the obvious reforms. After that, field agents would gently guide further development, and give training in the fantastic parapsychic powers to qualified natives. The standards therefore weren't impossibly high — apart from physical and mental potentiality, there was simply the ethic of civilized behavior. Usually it took only four or five generations for all normal dwellers on a planet to become full citizens; and meanwhile the benefits of reform, peace, order, higher production for less work, medicine, interstellar trade and exploration were freely available to everyone. A nation, a world, would leap at the chance.

Only Earth didn't.

Skepticism, laughter, alarm, malignant slyness . . . Chi shuddered,

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there in the quiet Cambridge room, as she remembered what had been in the mind of a dictator who had believed. After they refused him and made it plain what the Union meant, they had never been quite safe from his assassins.

America had seemed the best bet. If it joined, the dam was broken. And while the President had not accepted them as anything but a pair of bunco artists, there were the people. Convince enough of them, and the government of a democratic country would have to yield. Barnstorming!

Money was no problem. With a slight mental effort, they could duplicate the currency of any nation, atom by atom. Auditoriums could be hired, advertisements bought — and a free show had never lacked for an audience.

It should have worked. Khorokum teleported himself across the stage. He floated automobiles and tractors onto the scene, and duplicated them there from piles of sand. He extracted seventh roots in his head. He turned the lights on and off by a thought. He identified individuals and told them what they were thinking. He asked them to invent tricks for him, and could almost always perform as directed, from controlling the throw of dice to whisking an elephant onstage. At the conclusion of the show, he materialized the full instrument ensemble of an orchestra to play him a grand finale.

It was good. They applauded wildly and shouted for encores. But they didn't believe him. His accompanying lecture about his true nature and purposes, his earnest request that they write their Congressmen and their President, struck them as a smart new line of patter. That was all.

The psychology of it was unique in the known Galaxy. Khorokum could understand some of the reasons. After all, humanity had been exposed to lunatics of one sort or another for centuries, self-styled prophets of this and that, fakers, as well as magicians who never claimed to be more than experts at deception — to say nothing of the visionary fiction which had worn the Galactic Union story a little thin ahead of the reality. Yes, they'd had to develop skepticism, a sort of racial immunity to fantastic claims.

But even so, to reject the evidence of the senses and plain logic . . . !

Then finally, on the blank edge of discouragement, the G-men arriving, an escort to the White House, an interview with the President and his important military and political associates . . .

Khorokum's smile was bitter as he related that part of the story. Almost no one at the conference had believed that the visitors were from outer space, and those who did considered the fact irrelevant. The pair had extraordinary powers. As spies, as projectors of atomic bombs, as shields for advancing troops, the Urukandians could perhaps be useful. But as emissaries . . . the United States government could hardly accept formal ambassadors from a country no one had ever seen!

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"Someone wanted to be taken back with us," said Chi. "It wasn't a bad idea, except that on a long hop an untrained mind could distort things, would probably kill us all. Besides, they didn't really want to join, even if they were sure. It would have upset the status quo, in which they had attained success."

"The present situation has made them pathologically suspicious and xenophobic," added Khorokum. "It presages ill for your world if you don't get outside help."

"You have become a political issue, you know," said Van Tyne. "Russia at once denies that you exist and accuses us of making a secret weapon of you. Norway is up in arms because you didn't go direct to the U.N. but said it was neither a government nor even a good debating society. France thinks it's some kind of plot to pry her colonies loose from her. Questions have been asked in the British House of Commons. It's that way all over the world: nobody is sure what you are, but many are aware that you represent some new factor. You may end up precipitating the very crisis you're trying to avoid."

"When we refused to help them with their plans," said Khorokum, "they pointed out that we're technically guilty of counterfeiting, to say nothing of illegal entry, subversion, inciting to riot, and I don't know what else. They demanded our passports, birth certificates, draft cards, income tax returns . . . The land of the free and the home of the brave!"

"And then —?"

"We said we'd go right on taking our case to the people. They replied that we were outlaws; and while they can't successfully hold us in jail, they can break up all our meetings and deluge us under such a barrage of official denunciation that no one will ever listen to us. That's what they've been doing for the past few days, as you know.

"All right, gentlemen." En-Shan Khorokum leaned back in his chair and smiled bleakly. "If you accept our story, you are our last hope. You have to tell us. *How can we convince Earth?*"

The vision went around the circle of men, rapt eyes, indrawn breaths, the realization that they would partake in the rewards the whole planet would have and that most likely all of them could qualify for immediate mind training. Morton said at last, slowly: "If you aren't telling the truth, you're at least the most extraordinary phenomenon science has yet encountered. I, for one, am going to take your truthfulness as a working hypothesis."

"Occam's razor," said Johns, fingering his beard.

"Its application is sometimes a matter of dispute," said the mathematician

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Lucasczewski. "Is it simpler to believe that these people are from an advanced civilization or that they are merely terrestrial mutants with unusual powers?"

"I'll take the interstellar hypothesis any day," said the geneticist Phillips. "All that ability in one mutation? Hah!"

"I suppose so," said Morton, "though we'll certainly have to revise our physics." His eyes glowed. "God, but we can learn!"

"This is getting us nowhere," said Van Tyne impatiently. "These young people have a problem. Who has a solution?"

"Another country?" suggested Johns. "Some nation at once more stable and more progressive than ours — oh, say Sweden or Switzerland?"

"Maybe we should have tried that at first," admitted Khorokum gloomily. But certainly not after the United States government has formally branded us as charlatans and criminals."

"I fail to understand," said Phillips. "How people can be so stupid, I mean. I never was too unbearable an intellectual snob, I hope, but when the much-touted Common Man can't see what's as plain as Mendel's law — when he can't reason from the facts that it's at least probable that you two are from outer space — gracious, Foxxe, I often wonder why you Britishers didn't keep your aristocracy in power."

"Oh, Joe Average isn't so very stupid," said Morton. "What the devil, I'll bet half our fathers were from the lower economic brackets. But he's been fooled too often. He knows, or thinks he knows, that all these amazing effects can be produced by perfectly ordinary means. In any case, how many people have actually *seen* you two perform, not over a TV screen but with their own eyes? What you need is something spectacular that everyone can see directly."

"Even then they'd call it a fake," said Johns darkly. "You could light up the sky with letters ten miles tall asking them to join your Galactic Union, and they'd look for a cigaret ad underneath the message. Psychologists would probably call it mass delusion!"

"It's a common enough phenomenon, really." said Foxxe. "I've seen it happen time and again. Primitive peoples, isolated, hardly seen a white man in living memory, y'know. Somebody flies an airplane in. They may be a little scared at first, though more often than not they'll shoot at it. But then it's accepted. Just isn't a marvel, y'know, or rather it's simply another part of a mysterious and surprising world. It's accepted. Nobody wonders very much. What really gets a tribe like that excited, a genuine never-ending wonder, something to be almost worshiped, that's not one of our clever technical gadgets, oh, no. It's something just a little beyond what they have but not so far advanced that the bally old mind refuses to try t'understand

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it. An airplane . . . bah, just a large metal bird, what of it? A truck . . . int'resting. A horse and cart . . . oh, there's where they bring out the brass band and the keys to the village!"

"And we're the primitive tribe, eh?" chuckled Lucasczewski.

"I've read a lot of these science fiction stories," said Van Tyne. "Far advanced psychology, subtle trickery making a population do anything the hero wanted. How about it?"

"The stories never went into detail, did they?" asked Khorokum dryly.

"Big impressive fleet, robots, all that sort of thing?" suggested Foxxe.

"We don't have them," said Chi. "The Union left such devices behind hundreds of millennia ago."

"The most fantastic part of this business is its irony," said Johns. "Here you are, like gods almost, and you can't do a thing. You're *too* powerful!" He chuckled heavily. "Like a man who has a sixteen-inch naval rifle but no fly swatter. Looks as if you'll just have to let us stew in our bed or whatever the saying is."

Phillips sighed. "Damn it, anyway! I'd give my right arm to the left shoulder for a chance to see — learn — Oh, well . . ."

Khorokum got out of his chair and paced the floor. "I'm tired," he admitted. "It's been a fearful strain. I'm worn down too far to think. Maybe Chi and I had better go into hiding for a few months — that would be easy — and try to think of something in that time."

"Judging by the world situation," said Morton grimly, "you may not have that long."

"What to do, what to do?" Chi buried her face in her hands.

"A tribe," said Khorokum between his teeth. "An isolated tribe of savages, needing the spectacular but not very advanced proof, too blind to understand —"

Of a sudden he stopped. Chi sat bolt upright, and the same thought flamed between them.

"*A primitive tribe* —"

The circle of humans edged away, uncertain, dimly aware of the sudden mighty surge of will.

Then Foxxe was having his hand shaken almost off the wrist by Khorokum, who was babbling about the natives of Orkhuzan and mass production via atom-by-atom duplication of a covertly prepared prototype — and somewhat to the Englishman's surprise, and very much to his gratification, Chi Balkhai ran up and kissed him.

Four months later the spaceships came.

They blazed mightily out of the sky, filling heaven with flame and thun-

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der. There were three of them, each a good thousand feet long, and they rounded the world six times before settling into a Wisconsin cornfield.

The crews were fairly humanoid, though they had green skins and antennae and seven fingers to a hand. They received visitors graciously and set themselves to learning English, which they did with astonishing ease. As soon as possible, they explained that they were from Orkhuzan, a member planet of the Galactic Union.

When asked about the now almost forgotten pair who had disappeared four months ago, they seemed a little excited and consulted their files. Then they informed the inquirer that, yes, this En-Shan Khorokum and Chi Balkhai were notorious "traders." What was a "trader"? Oh, a petty criminal who traveled ahead of the Galactic Exploratory Service, reaching new planets first and trying to bilk the innocent natives. Fortunately, Earth's wise leaders had seen through this cheap scheme and the evil pair had fled. Alas, the Union was far from perfect.

Still, there were advantages to be gained by joining. The explorers showed copious files of pictures, statistics, specimens. They appeared on radio and television programs and answered all queries with charming frankness. They showed visitors through their ships and let them handle the mighty engines.

Yes, the Galactic Union was anxious to admit all the nations of Earth. There would be gains — well, nothing spectacular, obvious things which a science a couple of hundred years older than that of humanity would be expected to have. Cures for most diseases, regeneration of lost limbs and some organs, improved mental health, tripled lifespan — things like that.

Of course, the offer was not really disinterested. The Union wanted the technical genius of Earth. Why, even now humanity had three varieties of fission pile which nobody in the Union had ever thought of!

Would the honorable leaders and citizens of Earth care to consider it?

The United States, Great Britain, India, and several European and Latin American countries had joined, and a number of other lands were undergoing revolutions which would soon lead to their admission, when an eager young cub reporter contrived a chance to give one of the great spaceships a really detailed investigation. What he saw made him attempt some detective work, but those he was checking up on had covered their tracks too thoroughly. And since no more orthodox investigator was able (or eager) to pierce the security regulations surrounding the mighty ships, his unsupported word could never convince his editor that several items of control equipment had borne neat brass plates with the legend

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Historical note: Snully, that incompetent mite, was conjured up some thirteen years ago. The story that chronicled his angry frustration at the insane behavior of People was the first fantasy that Boucher ever published.

Snulbug

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"THAT'S A HELL of a spell you're using," said the demon, "if I'm the best you can call up."

He wasn't much. Bill Hitchens had to admit. He looked lost in the center of that pentacle. His basic design was impressive enough — snakes for hair, curling tusks, a sharp-tipped tail, all the works — but he was something under an inch tall.

Bill had chanted the words and lit the powder with the highest hopes. Even after the feeble flickering flash and the damp fizzling *zzzt* which had replaced the expected thunder and lightning, he had still had hopes. He had stared up at the space above the pentacle waiting to be awe-struck until he had heard that plaintive little voice from the floor wailing, "Here I am."

"Nobody's wasted time and powder on a misfit like me for years," the demon went on. "Where'd you get the spell?"

"Just a little something I whipped up," said Bill modestly.

The demon grunted and muttered something about people that thought they were magicians.

"But I'm not a magician," Bill explained. "I'm a biochemist."

The demon shuddered. "I land the damnedest cases," he mourned. "Working for that psychiatrist wasn't bad enough, I should draw a biochemist. Whatever that is."

Bill couldn't check his curiosity. "And what did you do for a psychiatrist?"

"He showed me to people who were followed by little men and told them I'd chase the little men away." The demon pantomimed shooting motions.

"And did they go away?"

"Sure. Only then the people decided they'd sooner have little men than me. It didn't work so good. Nothing ever does," he added woefully. "Yours won't, either."

Bill sat down and filled his pipe. Calling up demons wasn't so terrifying,

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after all. Something quiet and homey about it. "Oh, yes, it will," he said. "This is foolproof."

"That's what they all think. People —" The demon wistfully eyed the match as Bill lit his pipe. "But we might as well get it over with. What do you want?"

"I want a laboratory for my embolism experiments. If this method works, it's going to mean that a doctor can spot an embolus in the bloodstream long before it's dangerous and remove it safely. My ex-boss, that screwball old occultist Reuben Choatsby, said it wasn't practical — meaning there wasn't a fortune in it for him — and fired me. Everybody else thinks I'm wacky, too, and I can't get any backing. So I need $10,000."

"There!" the demon sighed with satisfaction. "I told you it wouldn't work. That's out for me. They can't start fetching money on demand till three grades higher than me. I told you."

"But you don't," Bill insisted, "appreciate all my fiendish subtlety. Look — Say, what is your name?"

The demon hesitated. "You haven't got another of those things?"

"What things?"

"Matches."

"Sure."

"Light me one, please?"

Bill tossed the burning match into the center of the pentacle. The demon scrambled eagerly out of the now cold ashes of the powder and dived into the flame, rubbing himself with the brisk vigor of a man under a needle shower. "There!" he gasped joyously. "That's more like it."

"And now what's your name?"

The demon's face fell again. "My name? You really want to know?"

"I've got to call you something."

"Oh no you don't. I'm going home. No money games for me."

"But I haven't explained yet what you are to do. What's your name?"

"Snulbug." The demon's voice dropped almost too low to be heard.

"Snulbug?" Bill laughed.

"Uh-huh. I've got a cavity in one tusk, my snakes are falling out, I haven't got troubles enough, I should be named Snulbug."

"All right. Now listen, Snulbug, can you travel into the future?"

"A little. I don't like it much, though. It makes you itch in the memory."

"Look, my fine snake-haired friend. It isn't a question of what you like. How would you like to be left there in that pentacle with nobody to throw matches at you?" Snulbug shuddered. "I thought so. Now, you can travel into the future?"

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"I said a little."

"And," Bill leaned forward and puffed hard at his corncob as he asked the vital question, "can you bring back material objects?" If the answer was no, all the fine febrile fertility of his spellmaking was useless. And if that was useless, Heaven alone knew how the Hitchens Embolism Diagnosis would ever succeed in ringing down the halls of history, and incidentally saving a few thousand lives annually.

Snulbug seemed more interested in the warm clouds of pipe smoke than in the question. "Sure," he said. "Within reason I can —" He broke off and stared up piteously. "You don't mean — You can't be going to pull that old gag again?"

"Look, baby. You do what I tell you and leave the worrying to me. You can bring back material objects?"

"Sure. But I warn you —"

Bill cut him off short. "Then as soon as I release you from that pentacle, you're to bring me tomorrow's newspaper."

Snulbug sat down on the burned match and tapped his forehead sorrowfully with his tail tip. "I knew it," he wailed. "I knew it. Three times already this happens to me. I've got limited powers, I'm a runt, I've got a funny name, so I should run foolish errands."

"Foolish errands?" Bill rose and began to pace about the bare attic. "Sir, if I may call you that, I resent such an imputation. I've spent weeks on this idea. Think of the limitless power in knowing the future. Think of what could be done with it: swaying the course of empire, dominating mankind. All I want is to take this stream of unlimited power, turn it into the simple channel of humanitarian research, and get me $10,000; and you call that a foolish errand!"

"That Spaniard," Snulbug moaned. "He was a nice guy, even if his spell was lousy. Had a solid, comfortable brazier where an imp could keep warm. Fine fellow. And he had to go ask to see tomorrow's newspaper — I'm warning you —"

"I know," said Bill hastily. "I've been over in my mind all the things that can go wrong. And that's why I'm laying three conditions on you before you get out of that pentacle. I'm not falling for the easy snares."

"All right." Snulbug sounded almost resigned. "Let's hear 'em. Not that they'll do any good."

"First: This newspaper must not contain a notice of my own death or of any other disaster that would frustrate what I can do with it."

"But shucks," Snulbug protested. "I can't guarantee that. If you're slated to die between now and tomorrow, what can I do about it? Not that I guess you're important enough to crash the paper."

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"Courtesy, Snulbug. Courtesy to your master. But I tell you what: When you go into the future, you'll know then if I'm going to die? Right. Well, if I am, come back and tell me and we'll work out other plans. This errand will be off."

"People," Snulbug observed, "make such an effort to make trouble for themselves. Go on."

"Second: The newspaper must be of this city and in English. I can just imagine you and your little friends presenting some dope with the Omsk and Tomsk *Daily Vuskutsukt.*"

"We should take so much trouble," said Snulbug.

"And third: The newspaper must belong to this space-time continuum, to this spiral of the serial universe, to this Wheel of If. However you want to put it. It must be a newspaper of the tomorrow which I myself shall experience, not of some other, to me hypothetical tomorrow."

"Throw me another match," said Snulbug.

"Those three conditions should cover it, I think. There's not a loophole there, and the Hitchens Laboratory is guaranteed."

Snulbug grunted. "You'll find out."

Bill took a sharp blade and duly cut a line of the pentacle with cold steel. But Snulbug simply dived in and out of the flame of his second match, twitching his tail happily, and seemed not to give a rap that the way to freedom was now open.

"Come on!" Bill snapped impatiently. "Or I'll take the match away."

Snulbug got as far as the opening and hesitated. "Twenty-four hours is a long way."

"You can make it."

"I don't know. Look." He shook his head, and a microscopic dead snake fell to the floor. "I'm not at my best. I'm shot to pieces lately, I am. Tap my tail."

"Do what?"

"Go on. Tap it with your fingernail right there where it joins on."

Bill grinned and obeyed. "Nothing happens."

"Sure nothing happens. My reflexes are all haywire. I don't know as I can make twenty-four hours." He brooded, and his snakes curled up into a concentrated clump. "Look. All you want is tomorrow's newspaper, huh? Just tomorrow's, not the edition that'll be out exactly twenty-four hours from now?"

"It's noon now —" Bill reflected. "Sure, I guess tomorrow morning's paper'll do."

"O. K. What's the date today?"

"August 21."

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"Fine. I'll bring you a paper for August 22. Only I'm warning you: It won't do any good. But here goes nothing. Goodby now. Hello again. Here you are." There was a string in Snulbug's horny hand, and on the end of the string was a newspaper.

"But hey!" Bill protested. "You haven't been gone."

"People," said Snulbug feelingly, "are dopes. Why should it take any time out of the present to go into the future? I leave this point, I come back to this point. I spent two hours hunting for this damned paper, but that doesn't mean two hours out of your time here. People —" he snorted.

Bill scratched his head. "I guess it's all right. Let's see the paper. And I know: You're warning me." He turned quickly to the obituaries to check. No Hitchens. "And I wasn't dead in the time you were in?"

"No," Snulbug admitted. "Not *dead*," he added, with the most pessimistic implications possible.

"What was I then? Was I —"

"I had salamander blood," Snulbug complained. "They thought I was an undine like my mother and they put me in the cold-water incubator when any dope knows salamandry is a dominant. So I'm a runt and good for nothing but to run errands, and now I should make prophecies! You read your paper and see how much good it does you."

Bill laid down his pipe and folded the paper back from the obituaries to the front page. He had not expected to find anything useful there — what advantage could he gain from knowing who won the next naval engagement or which cities were bombed? — but he was scientifically methodical. And this time method was rewarded. There it was, streaming across the front page in vast black blocks:

MAYOR ASSASSINATED

FIFTH COLUMN KILLS CRUSADER

Bill snapped his fingers. This was it. This was his chance. He jammed his pipe in his mouth, hastily pulled a coat on his shoulders, crammed the priceless paper into a pocket, and started out of the attic. Then he paused and looked around. He'd forgotten Snulbug. Shouldn't there be some sort of formal discharge?

The dismal demon was nowhere in sight. Not in the pentacle nor out of it. Not a sign or a trace of him. Bill frowned. This was definitely not methodical. He struck a match and held it over the bowl of his pipe.

A warm sigh of pleasure came from inside the corncob.

Bill took the pipe from his mouth and stared at it. "So that's where you are?" he said musingly.

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"I told you salamandry was a dominant," said Snulbug, peering out of the bowl. "I want to go along. I want to see just what kind of a fool you make of yourself." He withdrew his head into the glowing tobacco, muttering about newspapers, spells, and, with a wealth of unhappy scorn, people.

The crusading mayor of Granton was a national figure of splendid proportions. Without hysteria, red-baiting, or strike-breaking, he had launched a quietly purposeful and well-directed program against subversive elements which had rapidly converted Granton into the safest and most American city in the country. He was also a persistent advocate of national, state, and municipal subsidy of the arts and sciences — the ideal man to wangle an endowment for the Hitchens Laboratory, if he were not so surrounded by overly skeptical assistants that Bill had never been able to lay the program before him.

This would do it. Rescue him from assassination in the very nick of time — in itself an act worth calling up demons to perform — and then when he asks, "And how, Mr. Hitchens, can I possibly repay you?" come forth with the whole great plan of research. It couldn't miss.

No sound came from the pipe bowl, but Bill clearly heard the words, "Couldn't it just?" ringing in his mind.

He braked his car to a fast stop in the red zone before the city hall, jumped out without even slamming the door, and dashed up the marble steps so rapidly, so purposefully, that pure momentum carried him up three flights and through four suites of offices before anybody had the courage to stop him and say, "What goes?"

The man with the courage was a huge bull-necked plain-clothes man, whose bulk made Bill feel relatively about the size of Snulbug. "All right there," this hulk rumbled. "All right. Where's the fire?"

"In an assassin's gun," said Bill. "And it had better stay there."

Bullneck had not expected a literal answer. He hesitated long enough for Bill to push him to the door marked MAYOR — PRIVATE. But though the husky's brain might move slowly, his muscles made up for the lag. Just as Bill started to shove the door open, a five-pronged mound of flesh lit on his neck and jerked.

Bill crawled from under a desk, ducked Bullneck's left, reached the door, executed a second backward flip, climbed down from the table, ducked a right, reached the door, sailed in reverse, and lowered himself nimbly from the chandelier.

Bullneck took up a stand in front of the door, spread his legs in ready balance, and drew a service automatic from its holster. "You ain't going in there," he said, to make the situation perfectly clear.

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Bill spat out a tooth, wiped the blood from his eyes, picked up the shattered remains of his pipe, and said, "Look. It's now 12:30. At 12:32 a red-headed hunchback is going to come out on that balcony across the street and aim through the open window into the mayor's office. At 12:33 His Honor is going to be slumped over his desk, dead. Unless you help me get him out of range."

"Yeah?" said Bullneck. "And who says so?"

"It says so here. Look. In the paper."

Bullneck guffawed. "How can a paper say what ain't even happened yet? You're nuts, brother, if you ain't something worse. Now go on. Scram. Go peddle your paper."

Bill's glance darted out the window. There was the balcony facing the mayor's office. And there coming out on it —

"Look!" he cried. "If you won't believe me, look out the window. See on that balcony? The red-headed hunchback? Just like I told you. Quick!"

Bullneck stared despite himself. He saw the hunchback peer across into the office. He saw the sudden glint of metal in the hunchback's hand. "Brother," he said to Bill, "I'll tend to you later."

The hunchback had his rifle halfway to his shoulder when Bullneck's automatic spat and Bill braked his car in the red zone, jumped out, and dashed through four suites of offices before anybody had the courage to stop him.

The man with the courage was a huge bullnecked plain-clothes man, who rumbled, "Where's the fire?"

"In an assassin's gun," said Bill, and took advantage of Bullneck's confusion to reach the door marked MAYOR — PRIVATE. But just as he started to push it open, a vast hand lit on his neck and jerked.

As Bill descended from the chandelier after his third try, Bullneck took up a stand in front of the door, with straddled legs and drawn gun. "You ain't going in," he said clarifyingly.

Bill spat out a tooth and outlined the situation. " — at 12:33," he ended, "His Honor is going to be slumped over his desk dead. Unless you help me get him out of range. See. It says so here. In the paper."

"How can it? Gwan. Go peddle your paper."

Bill's glance darted to the balcony. "Look, if you won't believe me. See the red-headed hunchback? Just like I told you. Quick! We've got to —"

Bullneck stared. He saw the sudden glint of metal in the hunchback's hand. "Brother," he said, "I'll tend to you later."

The hunchback had his rifle halfway to his shoulder when Bullneck's automatic spat and Bill braked his car in the red zone, jumped out, and — dashed through four suites before anybody stopped him.

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The man who did was a bull-necked plain-clothes man, who rumbled —

"Don't you think," said Snulbug, "you've had about enough of this?"

Bill agreed mentally, and there he was sitting in his roadster in front of the city hall. His clothes were unrumpled, his eyes were bloodless, his teeth were all there, and his corncob was still intact. "And just what," he demanded of his pipe bowl, "has been going on?"

Snulbug popped his snaky head out. "Light this again, will you? It's getting cold. Thanks."

"What happened?" Bill insisted.

"People!" Snulbug moaned. "No sense. Don't you see? So long as that newspaper was in the future, it was only a possibility. If you'd had, say, a hunch that the mayor was in danger, maybe you could have saved him. But when I brought it into now, it became a fact. You can't possibly make it untrue."

"But how about man's free will? Can't I do whatever I want to do?"

"Sure. It was your precious free will that brought the paper into now. You can't undo your own will. And, anyway, your will's still free. You're free to go getting thrown around chandeliers as often as you want. You probably like it. You can do anything up to the point where it would change what's in that paper. Then you have to start in again and again and again until you make up your mind to be sensible."

"But that —" Bill fumbled for words, "that's just as bad as . . . as fate or predestination. If my soul wills to —"

"Newspapers aren't enough. Time theory isn't enough. So I should tell him about his soul! People —" And Snulbug withdrew into the bowl.

Bill looked up at the city hall regretfully and shrugged his resignation. Then he folded his paper to the sports page and studied it carefully.

Snulbug thrust his head out again as they stopped in the many-acred parking lot. "Where is it this time?" he wanted to know. "Not that it matters."

"The racetrack."

"Oh —" Snulbug groaned. "I might have known it. You're all alike. No sense in the whole caboodle. I suppose you found a long shot?"

"Darned tooting I did. Alhazred at twenty to one in the fourth. I've got $500, the only money I've got left on earth. Plunk on Alhazred's nose it goes, and there's our $10,000."

Snulbug grunted. "I hear his lousy spell, I watch him get caught on a merry-go-round, it isn't enough, I should see him lay a bet on a long shot."

"But there isn't a loophole in this. I'm not interfering with the future; I'm just taking advantage of it. Alhazred'll win this race whether I bet on

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him or not. Five pretty hundred-dollar parimutuel tickets, and behold: The Hitchens Laboratory!" Bill jumped spryly out of his car and strutted along joyously. Suddenly he paused and addressed his pipe: "Hey! Why do I feel so good?"

Snulbug sighed dismally. "Why should anybody?"

"No, but I mean: I took a hell of a shellacking from that plug-ugly in the office. And I haven't got a pain or an ache."

"Of course not. It never happened."

"But I felt it then."

"Sure. In a future that never was. You changed your mind, didn't you? You decided not to go up there?"

"O. K., but that was after I'd already been beaten up twice."

"Uh-Uh," said Snulbug firmly. "It was before you hadn't been." And he withdrew again into the pipe.

There was a band somewhere in the distance and the raucous burble of an announcer's voice. Crowds clustered around the $2 windows, and the five weren't doing bad business. But the $500 window, where the five beautiful pasteboards lived that were to create an embolism laboratory, was almost deserted.

Bill buttonholed a stranger with a purple nose. "What's the next race?"

"Second, Mac."

Swell, Bill thought. Lots of time. And from now on — He hastened to the $100 window and shoved across the five bills which he had drawn from the bank that morning. "Alhazred, on the nose," he said.

The clerk frowned with surprise, but took the money and turned to get the tickets.

Bill buttonholed a stranger with a purple nose. "What's the next race?"

"Second, Mac."

Swell, Bill thought. And then he yelled, "Hey!"

A stranger with a purple nose paused and said, " 'Smatter, Mac?"

"Nothing," Bill groaned. "Just everything."

The stranger hesitated. "Ain't I seen you some place before?"

"No," said Bill hurriedly. "You were going to, but you haven't. I changed my mind."

The stranger walked away shaking his head and muttering how the ponies could get a guy.

Not till Bill was back in his roadster did he take the corncob from his mouth and glare at it. "All right!" he barked. "What was wrong this time? Why did I get on a merry-go-round again? I didn't try to change the future!"

Snulbug popped his head out and yawned a tuskful yawn. "I warn him,

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I explain it, I warn him again, now he wants I should explain it all over."

"But what did I do?"

"What did he do? You changed the odds, you dope. That much folding money on a long shot at a parimutuel track, and the odds change. It wouldn't have paid off at twenty to one the way it said in the paper."

"Nuts," Bill muttered. "And I suppose that applies to anything? If I study the stock market in this paper and try to invest my $500 according to tomorrow's market —"

"Same thing. The quotations wouldn't be quite the same if you started in playing. I warned you. You're stuck," said Snulbug. "You're stymied. It's no use." He sounded almost cheerful.

"Isn't it?" Bill mused. "Now look, Snulbug. Me, I'm a great believer in Man. This universe doesn't hold a problem that Man can't eventually solve. And I'm no dumber than the average."

"That's saying a lot, that is," Snulbug sneered. "People —"

"I've got a responsibility now. It's more than just my $10,000. I've got to redeem the honor of Man. You say this is the insoluble problem. I say there *is* no insoluble problem."

"I say you talk a lot."

Bill's mind was racing furiously. How can a man take advantage of the future without in any smallest way altering that future? There must be an answer somewhere, and a man who devised the Hitchens Embolus Diagnosis could certainly crack a little nut like this. Man cannot refuse a challenge.

Unthinking, he reached for his tobacco pouch and tapped out his pipe on the sole of his foot. There was a microscopic thud as Snulbug crashed onto the floor of the car.

Bill looked down half-smiling. The tiny demon's tail was lashing madly, and every separate snake stood on end. "This is too much!" Snulbug screamed. "Dumb gags aren't enough, insults aren't enough, I should get thrown around like a damned soul. This is the last straw. Give me my dismissal!"

Bill snapped his fingers gleefully. "Dismissal!" he cried. "I've got it, Snully. We're all set."

Snulbug looked up puzzled and slowly let his snakes droop more amicably. "It won't work," he said, with an omnisciently sad shake of his serpentine head.

It was the dashing act again that carried Bill through the Choatsby Laboratories, where he had been employed so recently, and on up to the very anteroom of old R. C.'s office.

But where you can do battle with a bull-necked guard, there is not a thing

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you can oppose against the brisk competence of a young lady who says, "I shall find out if Mr. Choatsby will see you." There was nothing to do but wait.

"And what's the brilliant idea this time?" Snulbug obviously feared the worst.

"R. C.'s nuts," said Bill. "He's an astrologer and a pyramidologist and a British Israelite — American Branch Reformed — and Heaven knows what else. He . . . why, he'll even believe in you."

"That's more than I do," said Snulbug. "It's a waste of energy."

"He'll buy this paper. He'll pay anything for it. There's nothing he loves more than futzing around with the occult. He'll never be able to resist a good solid slice of the future, with illusions of a fortune thrown in."

"You better hurry then."

"Why such a rush? It's only 2:30 now. Lots of time. And while that girl's gone there's nothing for us to do but cool our heels."

"You might at least," said Snulbug, "warm the heel of your pipe."

The girl returned at last. "Mr. Choatsby will see you."

Reuben Choatsby overflowed the outsize chair behind his desk. His little face, like a baby's head balanced on a giant suet pudding, beamed as Bill entered. "Changed your mind, eh?" His words came in sudden soft blobs, like the abrupt glugs of pouring sirup. "Good. Need you in K-39. Lab's not the same since you left."

Bill groped for the exactly right words. "That's not it, R. C. I'm on my own now and I'm doing all right."

The baby-face soured. "Damned cheek. Competitor of mine, eh? What you want now? Waste my time?"

"Not at all." With a pretty shaky assumption of confidence, Bill perched on the edge of the desk. "R. C.," he said, slowly and impressively, "what would you give for a glimpse into the future?"

Mr. Choatsby glugged vigorously. "Ribbing me? Get out of here! Have you thrown out — Hold on! You're the one — Used to read queer books. Had a grimoire here once." The baby-face grew earnest. "What you mean?"

"Just what I said, R. C. What would you give for a glimpse into the future?"

Mr. Choatsby hesitated. "How? Time travel? Pyramid? You figured out the King's Chamber?"

"Much simpler than that. I have here" — he took it out of his pocket and folded it so that only the name and the date line were visible — "tomorrow's newspaper."

Mr. Choatsby grabbed. "Let me see."

"Uh-uh. Naughty. You'll see after we discuss terms. But there it is."

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"Trick. Had some printer fake it. Don't believe it."

"All right. I never expected you, R. C., to descend to such unenlightened skepticism. But if that's all the faith you have —" Bill stuffed the paper back in his pocket and started for the door.

"Wait!" Mr. Choatsby lowered his voice. "How'd you do it? Sell your soul?"

"That wasn't necessary."

"How? Spells? Cantrips? Incantations? Prove it to me. Show me it's real. Then we'll talk terms."

Bill walked casually to the desk and emptied his pipe into the ash tray.

"I'm underdeveloped. I run errands. I'm named Snulbug. It isn't enough — now I should be a testimonial!"

Mr. Choatsby stared rapt at the furious little demon raging in his ash tray. He watched reverently as Bill held out the pipe for its inmate, filled it with tobacco, and lit it. He listened awe-struck as Snulbug moaned with delight at the flame.

"No more questions," he said. "What terms?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars." Bill was ready for bargaining.

"Don't put it too high," Snulbug warned. "You better hurry."

But Mr. Choatsby had pulled out his check book and was scribbling hastily. He blotted the check and handed it over. "It's a deal." He grabbed up the paper. "You're a fool, young man. Fifteen thousand! *Hmf!*" He had it open already at the financial page. "With what I make on the market tomorrow, never notice $15,000. Pennies."

"Hurry up," Snulbug urged.

"Good-by, sir," Bill began politely, "and thank you for —" But Reuben Choatsby wasn't even listening.

"What's all this hurry?" Bill demanded as he reached the elevator.

"People!" Snulbug sighed. "Never you mind what's the hurry. You get to your bank and deposit that check."

So Bill, with Snulbug's incessant prodding, made a dash to the bank worthy of his descents on the city hall and on the Choatsby Laboratories. He just made it, by stop-watch fractions of a second. The door was already closing as he shoved his way through at 3 o'clock sharp.

He made his deposit, watched the teller's eyes bug out at the size of the check, and delayed long enough to enjoy the incomparable thrill of changing the account from William Hitchens to The Hitchens Research Laboratory.

Then he climbed once more into his car, where he could talk with his pipe in peace. "Now," he asked as he drove home, "what was the rush?"

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"He'd stop payment."

"You mean when he found out about the merry-go-round? But I didn't promise anything. I just sold him tomorrow's paper. I didn't guarantee he'd make a fortune off it."

"That's all right. But —"

"Sure, you warned me. But where's the hitch? R. C.'s a bandit, but he's honest. He wouldn't stop payment."

"Wouldn't he?"

The car was waiting for a stop signal. The newsboy in the intersection was yelling "Uxtruh!" Bill glanced casually at the headline, did a double take, and instantly thrust out a nickel and seized a paper.

He turned into a side street, stopped the car, and went through this paper. Front page: MAYOR ASSASSINATED. Sports page: Alhazred at twenty to one. Obituaries: The same list he'd read at noon. He turned back to the date line. August 22. Tomorrow.

"I warned you," Snulbug was explaining. "I told you I wasn't strong enough to go far into the future. I'm not a well demon, I'm not. And an itch in the memory is something fierce. I just went far enough ahead to get a paper with to-morrow's date on it. And any dope knows that a Tuesday paper comes out Monday afternoon."

For a moment Bill was dazed. His magic paper, his fifteen-thousand-dollar paper, was being hawked by newsies on every corner. Small wonder R. C. might have stopped payment! And then he saw the other side. He started to laugh. He couldn't stop.

"Look out!" Snulbug shrilled. "You'll drop my pipe. And what's so funny?"

Bill wiped tears from his eyes. "I was right. Don't you see, Snulbug? Man can't be licked. My magic was lousy. All it could call up was you. You brought me what was practically a fake, and I got caught on the merry-go-round of time trying to use it. You were right enough there; no good could come of that magic.

"But without the magic, just using human psychology, knowing a man's weaknesses, playing on them, I made a sirup-voiced old bandit endow the very research he'd tabooed, and do more good for humanity than he's done in all the rest of his life. I was right, Snulbug. You can't lick Man."

Snulbug's snakes writhed into knots of scorn. "People!" he snorted. "You'll find out." And he shook his head with dismal satisfaction.

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If the first explorers of Space use a language so unscientifically ambiguous as English, they may find that their occupation is occupation *itself — that their prime business, before any possible trade or science, is the military accomplishment of occupying alien territory. The original occupants may, like the Plains Indians portrayed by Levi Crow elsewhere in this issue, have their own view of the matter . . . and new means, unknown to the ill-starred Sioux, of asserting that view.*

Occupation

by EDWARD W. LUDWIG

THE RED LIGHT over the door of the strato-jet blinked on. Once, twice, three times.

"This is it," said Lieutenant Perkins.

No one answered. There was a shuffling of feet, an adjusting of goggles, a clearing of throats. The door slid open noiselessly. A hissing Somian wind whipped into the plane's cabin, obscuring the dull rumble of jets.

"This is it," repeated Horton at last.

Lieutenant Perkins bailed out first. His tall body leaned into the wind, into the darkness, and suddenly he was gone. Horton and Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang and Green followed like toy soldiers on a factory belt, erect, being carried forward, then tumbling off one by one, counting the silent seconds with their leaps.

Down they hurtled and spun and twisted, down, down into the cool Somian night in this year of 2055. They were no longer Lieutenant Perkins and Horton and Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang and Green, no longer paratroopers of a United Earth. They were night-things, formless blobs, their names and identities surrendered to the darkness.

Horton pressed the stud over his chest, snapping on his shoulder para-jets. He felt the hot rush of air on his legs, scowled as the weight of deceleration pressed his head down and squeezed it against his chest.

The unpleasantness was soon over. Horton looked about him, at the blobs that were now floating instead of falling, at the specks of crimson from the para-jets, no larger than sparks from cigarette lighters. Above him gleamed the planet's three tiny moons, each the size of Venus in the early-morning

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skies of Earth, their pale glow reflected dimly by dark, vast seas of Somian wheat.

And he thought, *Over a fifth of Somia it must be like this. Over all the land inside the Wall men are falling, now, at this very second, thousands and thousands of them.*

He glanced up at the stars. *Which one is Sol? That one should be it — or is that Sirius? I wish I was sure. Then I'd wish I was there, in the System, on Earth. It'd be a great joke to look at a star and wish I was there and then have it turn out to be Sirius. A great joke.*

He laughed, and then the laughter died. *This is war*, he thought, *this is invasion. You don't think about Earth now.*

His jaw hardened, becoming a conqueror's jaw. His head raised, becoming a conqueror's head. For an instant strength was in him, but suddenly it was gone, like a match flame snuffed out by the blackness of infinity. And in its stead was a great weariness.

First Venus, he thought, *and then Mars, and Jupiter, or at least Jupiter's moons, and now Alpha Centauri. The universe must be safe for the colonists of a United Earth. But at least Alpha has only one planet. That's something to be thankful for, because this will be the last — for awhile. Thank you, God, that Alpha has only one planet.*

The broad expanse of Somian wheat burst up into his vision.

Woosh!

With a swishing and a thudding, his feet cut through the jungle of wheat and collided with hard earth. Breath exploded from his lungs. He sat on a cushion of crushed stalks, puffing, shaking his head. . . .

"Where's Green?" snapped a voice.

"I'm here," someone said in the darkness.

"Where's Horton?"

Horton's head jerked up.

"I'm here."

Lieutenant Perkins cleared his throat. "All right, the six of us are here. Now here's the idea. The Somians inside the Wall have no army, no cities, just a few houses along the Wall and in the fields. So it'll be guerilla stuff — house to house fighting, probably. We got to get them before they get organized. We don't know what to expect, but remember they've had atomic power for 10,000 years. They're an ancient race and a queer race. So keep your eyes open, and keep 'em away from the sky. You'll have plenty of time to look for Sol."

They walked slowly and cautiously, shouldering little paths through the neck-high forest of wheat, R-rifles in tight, ready hands.

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A queer race . . . atomic power for ten thousand years . . . don't know what to expect. The words echoed through Horton's mind. The nine-month war with 4,000,000 Somian swamp-people outside the Wall had been rugged enough. And the swamp-people had no atomic weapons, only contraband heat guns smuggled in during the past five years.

But the 100,000 Somians inside the Wall, Horton knew, were different. Of course, Intelligence reports were optimistic. Atomics, but no army. A few secret meetings, but no mass gatherings, no suggestion of possible strategies. It was odd.

"I remember a verse," murmured Green. "Will you walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly." He paused. "What comes next?"

"I don't know," Horton said, "but you're thinking what I'm thinking."

"Let's keep it quiet," growled Lieutenant Perkins.

They walked.

The slow, heavy tread of their footsteps was as familiar to Horton as breath in his lungs. You could narrow your eyes, looking at the boots and nothing else, and imagine them sloshing through the jungles of Venus, the sands of Mars, the swamps of Somia. And now the wheat fields of Somia. The heaviness, the slowness, the weariness were the same.

"There's the Wall of China," whispered Lopez, pointing.

Despite the feebleness of Somian moonlight, it shone white and solid, a great stone wall separating field from swamp, a monstrous ribbon twisting and melting into a black horizon.

"Why did they name it the Wall of China?" crisped Green. "This is Somia, not China."

"How does anything get named?" asked Chang. "Names just happen. I suppose a Chinese saw it first and it reminded him of home, and so he called it the Wall of China. Besides, it was built for the same purpose."

"Shut up!" snapped Lieutenant Perkins. "There's a house up there."

A small stone house, at the foot of the Wall.

The enemy.

Fear came to Horton. It was a cold, paralyzing tide bursting in his stomach, shooting fingers of ice into his weak legs, into his pounding heart, into his taut-muscled, sweat-beaded face.

I'm not afraid, he told himself. *I'm a soldier, I've been in battles, I've seen death and faced death. I'm not afraid.*

A moist swamp-wind licked across the surface of the wheat, teasing the slender stalks into reluctant, rustling rhythm. And the wind was like a soft voice within him, saying, *But this is different. It's different somehow. We belonged, maybe, on Venus and Mars and Ganymede, but not here. We don't*

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belong here, and we don't know what's going to happen. I don't like it when you don't know what's going to happen.

They approached the house, crouching low, stopping as they reached the final fringe of wheat stalks. The front door of the house was open, a pale rectangle of light, the golden, quivering light cast by oil lamps.

Suddenly, movement.

A dark figure emerging from the doorway, slowly, shuffling onto the stone patio before the house. Then another figure, and another, each carrying something in its arms.

And then a fourth, this one holding an oil lamp whose feeble glow revealed the face of a small boy with a tangle of thick black hair and round, wide child-eyes.

The first three moved deftly, depositing their burdens in a little pile on the patio. Their features were cloaked in darkness, for light from the lamp seemed a world unto itself, confined to the boy's face, compressed and held there by the solidity of the night.

Horton frowned. This, of course, was a ceremony. A plea, perhaps, to some strange god, or an attempt at an ancient magic. There was nothing threatening here.

But why didn't Lieutenant Perkins signal? Why —

Light!

A blinding white explosion of light that seemed to cover all the universe with its brilliancy, blanketing every atom, seeping into the remotest corners of darkness. It was the light of a hundred suns, a light so intense it seemed that night must be destroyed forever.

There was no heat, really, and no wind. Only a weak gust of air, soft as breath and warm as breath. There was no sound save a faint hissing, as of air escaping from a valve.

But a moment later the light died as quickly as it had come. Darkness swept in like air into a vacuum.

Blinded, Horton sank to his knees. He dug his palms into hot eyes, trying to rub away the searing whiteness that still clung to his vision, trying to thrust it back into the night. He blinked furiously. The whiteness dissolved to be replaced by great, undulating bands of fiery red, an impenetrable veil separating him from the others and imprisoning him.

He sat motionless for five minutes, ten minutes, his eyes closed. At last he opened them. There was darkness, but it was the welcome darkness of Somian night. Ahead was the stone house, its door still open. To his left were Perkins and Green; to his right, Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang.

He breathed deeply. He was not blind. Nothing had changed. They were still soldiers and still conquerors.

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And the enemy was still here.

Lieutenant Perkins signaled. Green crept to the rear of the house; Chang took his station in front with his portable video.

Lieutenant Perkins signaled again. There was a scurrying, a swift brushing of bodies against wheat. Shapes darted through the darkness, black little knots of tension in the relaxed, quiet, cool Somian night. It was all very methodical now, very efficient. They were still soldiers and still conquerors, and therefore they were not afraid.

But Horton thought, *My God, this is it, this is really it.*

And he and Lieutenant Perkins barged toward the open doorway, fingers on the triggers of their R-rifles. He felt as if he were treading on a gigantic balloon that would explode at any instant, blinding him as the strange, terrible light had blinded him, and ripping him apart, too. Closer and closer to the door. Closer and closer.

Abruptly, they were inside.

The Somians looked calmly up at them.

An old man with a bald, wrinkled skull and a thin red beard smiled at them. He was squatting on the stone floor, clad in a robe-like garment of white, his pipe-stem arms folded.

"Good evening," he said softly, nodding. "We were wondering how long you would wait outside."

A raven-haired girl, reclining on the fuzzy white skin of a *zlith*, put down an ancient volume she had been reading, carefully inserting the long leaf of a swamp rose between two pages of parchment. She gazed at them, smiling.

A young man of about twenty stood behind her, stiffly, smiling, too. In his hands was a small knife and a bamboo-like reed. He was, evidently, carving a Somian flute.

And squatting beside him was the boy-child with the wide eyes of one who expects good things. His smile made Horton's gaze tremble and drop to the floor.

Then Horton saw the weapons — or what had been weapons, the incredible, nameless defenses of the Somian civilization. A tangled bulk of charred, twisted tubes and coils and mirrors, so black it seemed they had been held in the flames of a sun. What manner of weapons they had been, Horton knew not.

Gottlieb and Lopez tramped into the room.

Gottlieb said, saluting, "We searched the other rooms. Everyone's here, Lieutenant."

Perkins grunted. He saw the weapons, kicked at them. "What's this?"

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"Our weapons," replied the old man.

"What happened to them?"

"We destroyed them."

Lieutenant Perkins blinked. "You *what?*"

"We destroyed them. You saw us destroy them just a few minutes ago, outside. We brought them inside so you would be sure to see them." The old Somian smiled. "You see, they were far superior to yours. We did not want you to learn their secrets."

"You did not want —" Lieutenant Perkins made a contemptuous, spluttering sound.

"It's a trick," said Gottlieb.

"Search the house!" Lieutenant Perkins commanded. "They have weapons, I'm sure of that!"

Gottlieb and Lopez and Horton searched, tapping the stone walls and floors, moving the old, heavy volumes from stone shelves, digging into bins of Somian wheat, into chests full of strange things: flutes, carvings of robed men with beards, curious collections of oddly-shaped disks, silver and gold models of swamp boats, delicate paintings of Somian life — signed by an artist who died 30,000 years ago.

At last they returned to Lieutenant Perkins.

"We found no weapons," said Horton.

"They have hidden them," said Gottlieb. "They are in the wheat fields, or under the Wall, or in the swamps."

The red-bearded Somian shook his head. "No, those were our only weapons. We destroyed them."

"If you destroyed them," said Lieutenant Perkins, "how can you fight?"

"We — those of us behind the Wall — have decided not to fight a war."

"Then you surrender?"

The old man smiled, patiently. "We do not surrender because we have never been at war. Our weapons were greater than yours; we could have destroyed your planet. And yet there are many, many more of you. The result would have been a balance. Both races would have perished."

"But this *is* war. We've invaded your country!"

The dark-eyed Somian girl stepped forward. "You have been afraid of us. You have said that you must attack us before we attack you. Now you see that we will not attack anyone. We hope you will leave."

"This is a Somian trick," said Gottlieb.

Lieutenant Perkins was silent for a few seconds. He looked helpless, like a child confronted with the unfamiliar spectre of death.

Finally he snapped to Horton, "Get Chang in here! Have him call H. Q.! Find out what's going on!"

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A moment later Chang entered, adjusted his portable video and clamped ear-phones to his head. Soon he said, "It's like this everywhere, Lieutenant, everywhere inside the Wall."

"Maybe it *isn't* a trick," said Horton. "Maybe it's the real thing."

Lieutenant Perkins snorted. "Impossible! They wouldn't —"

"Look there, Lieutenant," said Lopez, "there, out the window." He pointed. "It's a flash of light, a long ways away, like the one that blinded us. And over there! There's another — and another!"

Gottlieb said, "If this isn't a trick, then these people are crazy." He frowned thoughtfully. "Of course! Any people, living in stone houses and using oil lamps when they have atomics, would have to be crazy — damned crazy."

"Or damned wise," said Horton.

Lieutenant Perkins wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Suddenly laughter broke from his lips. He laughed his deep, rolling, hysterical laughter until it was a dark, evil cloud tumbling through the stone rooms and out into the cool, clean night.

Then it froze, sucked away by the impartial night and the silent, staring faces.

His upper lip twitched. A flushed defiance entered his features.

"Cowards!" he barked. "Cowards and fools! Don't you know what it means not to fight? We'll take your homes, we'll make you slaves!"

The old red-bearded Somian rose, slowly. Ever so slowly, smiling. "We don't think you will," he said.

Lieutenant Perkins spat, "We'll do worse than that. We'll kill you!"

The Somian kept smiling.

"We'll kill you!" screamed Lieutenant Perkins, brandishing his R-rifle.

The smile widened.

Poof!

The old man fell, clutching the nothingness where his stomach had been.

The young man with the half-carved flute stiffened, biting his lip. Hatred flamed briefly in his eyes, very briefly, a pinpoint of hatred existing for a pinpoint of time. It vanished, and he took a deep breath.

"We knew this might happen," he said. "It is better for some of us to be killed than all of us. It is better for all our race to be killed than both races."

Time seemed to have stopped. Thought and movement came slowly now, like limbs walking under water.

Finally Gottlieb said, "This is no trick, and these people are not crazy." His words came hard, as if each were a leaden weight cast reluctantly from his tongue. He looked weary and confused.

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Horton said, "It is good. There will be no war now, and no more conquering and killing, and no need for an army."

"No need for an army —" Lieutenant Perkins ran a trembling hand over his white, sweat-beaded face. "Then — then what will we do?"

No one answered.

Lopez said, a kind of terror in his voice, "What *will* we do?"

The question hung in the still air, an ominous, undying, thousand-voiced echo. Lieutenant Perkins and Horton and Gottlieb and Green and Chang and Lopez were suddenly like lost, frightened children.

Then Horton turned to the young Somian man, a prayer forming in his wide eyes. "Perhaps," he murmured, "perhaps you could teach us what to do?"

For a long, long moment there was silence. The Somian's gaze traveled slowly over the Earthmen. It was an X-Ray gaze, penetrating, exploring, analyzing.

At last he glanced at the Somian girl and at the boy-child, and they smiled at him, and then he too smiled and nodded at Horton.

"Yes," he said, "I think we can teach you."

Note:

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As you have discovered in such stories as "The Rats" and "The Fly," Arthur Porges is (as befits a mathematician) a leading exponent of truth *in science fiction. Not for him the wilder flights of imagination, but the sober facts of immediate extrapolation. We will venture to state that no science fiction writer has ever typed a more strictly truthful sentence than that which opens the following story; and the same standard of absolute veracity is maintained to the inexorable end. It is not Mr. Porges' responsibility if the nature of truth may sometimes be such as to make your ribs ache with laughter.*

Story Conference

by ARTHUR PORGES

EVEN A MARTIAN MUST EAT.

For almost a year now, the Martian had been stranded on Earth, one unhappy alien in a society aggressive beyond all conception of his native planet. Initially he had thought, naïvely enough, of introducing himself as the first visitor from Mars and accepting graciously the enthusiastic homage of mankind. A better understanding of international affairs changed his mind, which was brilliantly capable. In the present jittery, nationalistic world, hypersensitive even to home-grown dissenters, a lone Martian might easily end up in a Twentieth Century oubliette.

If the Martian had owned one tenth of his father's immense technical knowledge, he might readily have become Earth's foremost engineer, but such background was wholly lacking. When his father's pioneer spaceship had shattered itself in the High Sierras, leaving the young Martian as the only survivor, Fate must have smiled at the irony, for the luckless castaway was that most impractical of all beings, even upon Mars — a poet.

True, his latest work seemed to Martian critics, atrabilious like all their kind, what "Sailing to Byzantium" was to discerning terrestrial literati — a veritable thunderclap of beauty and power; yet to make a living on Earth from poetry was no easier than on Mars. Even the little magazines would have none of it, preferring their own cliques of obscurantist writers.

So for a year the Martian did what he could: namely the backbreaking or menial tasks commonly given by white Americans to dark, by the French to Arabs, and by the Russians to native deviationists.

But for him, all that would soon be past. In his hand at this very moment

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was a note that could mean salvation. From the minute he had seen the cover of *Thrilling Space*, with its semi-nude girl in the hands of a spidery nightmare whose complexion resembled dirty stucco, the world had brightened. The story's title (how it had shocked even through his imperfect knowledge of English!); "A Martian Castaway," seemed at the time like a personal message of cheer.

For weeks he bought and read avidly the dozen or more publications specializing in science fiction. At first, it was merely diversion from nostalgia and drudgery; but before long, as his quick mind grew perceptive to good writing, he had an inspiration. Surely a person who could write *authentic* science fiction about Mars must necessarily dominate the field. Some fairly mediocre practitioners were reputed to receive five cents a word; he, with his unique knowledge of Martian life, ought to succeed in doubling that figure. It would beat dish-washing hollow.

And now, his first story having been mailed in some weeks ago, he held in one sweating palm a curt editorial note inviting "Mr. Smith" to a conference. Squaring his shoulders, the Martian took a deep breath and knocked gently on the door marked, SOBER SCIENCE FICTION. A few moments later, he was seated opposite a burly, genial man with unruly hair and a knowing eye. The novice waited, filled with pleasant anticipation; maybe he would get fifteen cents a word; the real thing was bound to register among so many phonies.

"Mr. Smith," the editor began warmly, "you have ability. Your story has an excellent plot, action, plenty of suspense, and remarkable, subtle characterization. I like the way you use words in new combinations; like a foreigner almost, but without awkwardness."

The author's melancholy blue eyes brightened. "You liked it?" he asked.

"Yes and no. I couldn't possibly use it."

"I don't understand. You just said —"

"Exactly. It has many good qualities, which I enumerated; but for our readers, it's completely out of the question." He leaned forward impressively. "The people who buy *Sober Science Fiction* are a most select group. They appreciate plot, action, and characterization — in fact, they're connoisseurs of literate writing — but they are absolute fanatics on science. And you, Smith, if I may speak frankly, know nothing whatever about astronomy, biology, or physics." He shook his head sadly. "Why you chose to write in the one field where sound technical knowledge is a *sine qua non*, I can't imagine; but here's a superior style" — he slapped the manuscript for emphasis — "ruined by a comprehensive ignorance of elementary science."

Smith appeared dazed. He fumbled at the neck of his shirt, pale skin

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oddly flushed. "I've been extremely careful about details," he protested, as the editor raised his eyebrows. "I don't really see where —"

"Obviously not. Details, indeed!" The editor's tone became sympathetic. "That's why I've taken this rather unusual step of explaining in person. You have real talent, and *Sober Science Fiction* is a magazine always on the lookout for promising new writers. Maybe you can be salvaged. I think you can, if you're not allergic to advice."

"You mean," Smith said wryly, "that if my science were — ah — sound, the story would be acceptable?"

"Yes. Although," the editor amended, lips judicially pursed, "I can't give any blanket assurance. I'd want to see such improvement first, naturally."

"I have another story right here. It has details about Mars that —"

"Never mind just now; no time. Let's go over the one you sent in." He riffled the sheets, frowning. "To begin with, here's a planet without water enough to dampen a toothbrush — and you make the hero a crack swimmer! Not only that, but every five minutes he's finding a river, lake, or pond to wallow in. On Mars! Now that's utterly fantastic. Our readers would laugh us off the stands."

"You mean," Smith said slowly, "there's no water on Mars?"

"Oh, Lord! You see? Didn't even bother to look it up, did you? No H. Spencer Jones, no *Conquest of Space* . . ."

"But how do they know? Nobody's been there."

"It's getting worse," the editor groaned. "You're even more hopeless on science than I thought. My God, Smith, haven't you ever heard of something called a spectroscope? It's a contraption — no, let's start with a telescope; that's simpler." He raised a cupped fist to one eye, and making a motion as if focussing, peered owlishly at the befuddled writer. "Look," he said in despair; "if there's anything the astronomers are certain of, it's that Mars is drier than — than —" He groped for a suitable comparison. "— than the lead story in last month's *Thrilling Space!*" he concluded, on a note of triumph.

"Well," Smith said with reluctance, "if that's the evidence available, I suppose —"

"That's it. Mars is dry and cold — just as sure as Jane Russell's a mammal! No use questioning well-established facts. Why, even a *Shocking Wonder* reader knows all about Mars. If you pick a planet of Sirius, nobody can gripe even if the natives disport themselves in an ocean of thousand-year-old brandy." He licked his lips.

"Still, one can surely assume —"

"For our readers you can't assume a damned thing. They're all technicians

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themselves. One of my writers turned out a story about a planet where the atmosphere was a mixture of hydrogen and chlorine gases. With a nice Earth-type sun yet. I'll never know how the hell I let that one by. We got 246 cancellations," he said gloomily. "For a lousy 35 cents some people expect entertainment plus the *Journal of Physical Chemistry*. You know, even the nuclear physics people at Oak Ridge read SSF. Why? Because they get sound science. Okay. Take another point, a biological one this time.

"A few years ago you could make the Martians all purple goo shaped like a topologist's nightmare, with feelers, wings, buck teeth, and living on yttrium metal for choice. That's all passé. The organisms nowadays have to be self-consistent. For example, your hero, Gryzzll Pfrafnik — and say, before I forget: That name. Won't do. Why would a society so far ahead of ours in its technology tolerate such absurd, jaw-breaking names? They'd probably use numbers and/or letters. Call the fellow BT-65-LS/MFT, or something. Scientists like things of that sort. Real systematic. Or if that's too Gernsback for you, there's the modern trend: short, euphonious names of a quasi-American sort. Smit for Smith, C'nor for Connor . . . and always remember: *Jon*, never John." He paused and looked puzzled. "Sound just the same, don't they? Never thought of it aloud. But remember: *never* use an *h* in Jon."

Smith nodded. "But a people might outgrow the number-letter stage. There are personal, psychological reasons for family names, not just bureaucratic. And if the names have deep cultural and social roots, they may not be changed or replaced by degenerate short forms. But all that's easily rewritten. This biological consistency matter seems to be something else."

"You bet it is. Here's this Pfrafnik — I used to know a delicatessen man with a name nearly as bad as that; nobody could pronounce his either; we called him Max. Anyway, here's Mr. P, 90 per cent anthropomorphic, and what do you do to the poor guy? You give him a completely pointless third eye — and a silly green tentacle. Evolutionarily speaking, that's inexcusable. Why should there be an odd eye between two perfectly good ones, and with the same field of view, particularly in an organism that's obviously meant to be bilaterally symmetrical? What does this third eye accomplish that the other two can't? Bet you never thought of that — just threw in an extra eye and a pretty green tentacle, and hey presto! — there's a Martian. If you looked through a book on comparative anatomy, or read up on the evolution of the vertebrates, you wouldn't make such monumental boners, Smith."

"I thought I explained," the writer objected, his voice a little shrill but painfully precise, "that the third eye was sensitive to infra-red rays."

The editor snorted. "That's even sillier. Dragged in just to make a

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third eye seem necessary. But it's impossible for such an organ, midway between two normal eyes, to develop a wholly different function while still structurally so similar to its neighbors. If it were on top of his head, like those Sphenodon lizards, or elsewhere on his body — no, even then, our readers wouldn't go for it. Not on such an anthropoid creature."

"There's also a social function for the third eye," Smith protested stubbornly. "It shows great anger. When the girl jilts him, you'll remember, he does a rare thing in giving her the 'third-eye-hate-glance.' Ordinarily it's almost invisible; just a faint whitish line."

"Well, that's a good touch, I admit; but you should work out something with the regular two eyes instead. What I'm trying to say is, keep all those fine bits of characterization; you do very well with some kinds of non-human behavior; but tidy up the astronomy and biology. And drop that damned tentacle."

"It's essential to the plot. You'll recall the social —"

"No." The editor was brusque. "Thirty years ago, they were all right. Every Martian and Venusian had an inalienable right to its full quota of squirming feelers. Not now. One tentacle can ruin a first-class science fiction story; I know, believe me. Why should a handsome, near-human young fellow have one lousy tentacle on his chest? The evolution just doesn't make any sense."

"In the story," said the writer, quivering slightly, "I made it quite clear how, starting from a mutation, the Martians deliberately altered their own biological development. After all, when a race knows enough to modify its own evolution —"

"I merely scanned that part," the editor broke in hastily. "I knew the tentacle would have to go in any case, so I didn't bother with details."

"Was there anything else wrong — with the science?"

"Plenty." He spoke with relish. "But no time for all the boners. You see what I mean. Study science. Get reference books. Check everything — *everything*. Guess only when there's no data, and then be mighty careful. Use good sense. Take that weird sex idea of yours. Two kinds of sex organs on the male, one for producing his own gender, the other for females. An embryologist would die laughing. Cell development simply can't work that way. What we're trying to do, Smith, is outguess the future. Some day we'll land on Mars and Venus. Our descendants will *know* what they're really like. Until then, we speculate — but only and always on the basis of valid, objective, demonstrable fact." He sank back wearily. "I don't think this story can be saved. Try something else, but study up first. Take my advice, and lay off Mars; too many tricky little facts to trip you up. Pick an extra-solar planet they don't know anything about. We get plenty

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of insane guesses about Mars, but yours is the worst and most careless in all my years of editing. My God! Your heroine's an egg-laying mammal!"

"But you have them here! What about the Platypus? The Echidna?"

The editor gave him a pitying glance. "Sure, the Platypus; I knew you'd bring *that* up. The Platypus is a transitional mammal, low in the scale. Look it up; you don't have to believe me. But a *higher* oviparous mammal is just a pipe-dream — a contradiction in terms. The brain evolves at roughly the same rate as the rest of the organism. A higher egg-laying mammal is just as much of a biological chimera as a cockroach that does algebra. Consistency — you see? Where the devil did you learn such effective English, such convincing behavior patterns without losing your comprehensive ignorance of science —" He broke off in alarm.

"So my science is all wrong!" Smith hissed venomously. "I'm an idiot, am I? Fat lot you know!" He stepped forward, shaking with fury.

"Hey, wait a minute!" the editor gulped. He looked about helplessly. That infernal secretary *would* slip out just now. This bird might get violent. With some of these touchy writers, you never could tell. "There was nothing personal. I didn't mean —" He gaped incredulously at three hard blue eyes blazing ferociously into his own.

"No, nothing personal!" the writer grated. "Me, either!" His shirt front flew open, and a green tentacle shot out, rugose and muscular. Like a snapped whip it flicked the manuscript from the editor's numb fingers.

"A hell of a lot you know about Mars!" Smith jeered. "I was hatched there — out of an egg! Yes, I said 'egg,' you lint-head!" He stepped back. "And another thing; my name is Gryzzll Pfrafnik, and it's no damn funnier than your own. 'Theobald A. Humperdinck, Editor'! What's the *a* for — 'Archimedes,' you two-bit scientist? One last remark: on Mars I have a pet cockroach that *can* do algebra; in fact, it does differential equations!" And standing there triumphantly, he awaited the editor's disintegration. Anger dissipated by his outburst, he looked forward with pleasure to spurning all apologies, however abject. Even for 40 cents a word!

For ten seconds there was silence, and for the briefest instant something like confusion flickered in the editor's eyes; then it vanished. He frowned.

"My dear Mr. Pfrafnik," he said coolly, "the oldest excuse of the novice writer is 'But this *really* happened to *me*.' Factuality is no concern of mine, nor of any artist. The question is convincing a reader. You may, sir, *be* just such a Martian as you describe; but your description simply does not arouse suspension of disbelief. Therefore your work fails. And now, if you'll excuse me —" He made an unmistakable gesture towards the door.

And Gryzzll Pfrafnik, the first writer to deal authentically with Mars, slunk out.

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In introducing this truly American *fantasy by a brilliant new writer we have resisted the temptation to expatiate at length on the grim tragedy of the Plains Indians. We have, rather, reserved our indignation for the shocking fact that but a handful of writers (the most prominent of these an Englishman!) has seen fit to tap the vast heritage of imaginative legend which those ravaged predecessors of ours bestowed on their marauding supplanters. So we extend — and hope you will too — a uniquely warm welcome to Mr. Crow, who knows to their last poetic detail the traditions of his mystic, warlike forebears, and to his story of a warrior whose heart was strong and who knew brief defeat and timeless victory against the white man's fire-weapons.*

Young-Man-With-Skull-At-His-Ear

by LEVI CROW

THE SUN FELL toward the horizon, late on the fourth afternoon, as Tall Hawk reined his pony at the only waterside he had found since the night before. He got off and watched the pony drink. Even thus alone, Tall Hawk forbade his brown young face to show his own thirst. His heart was strong. But his body, naked to the clout, was weak and famished.

There was nothing out here. From where he stood, with his hands on the pony's shoulder and his moccasined feet faltering, the prairie stretched away forever around him. Its expanse of yellow-green grass was as endless as the cloudless sky. Here and there lay dry buffalo chips. Some paces away, a grassy knoll made a little blotch of shade.

Tall Hawk turned away from the pony and made his way toward the knoll, with shaky, short steps, like an old woman. His lips were too dry to speak, and he said his prayer in his heart.

"*Hai-ya,* You Above! I am not a boy any more. My years are seventeen, and I want to be a warrior. I have fasted four days, to become a man and find a spirit-helper."

He paused by the knoll. His feet rested in its shade, as in a dark pool.

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"The other young men stay close to camp when they fast," he prayed in his heart. "They keep water to drink, though they do not eat. I thought I would fast from both food and water. I thought I would ride four days' journey from camp. Spirits might not choose to help me if my own friends were near enough to give help."

He tried not to hear the relishful sounds of the pony's drinking.

"The old men say that by fasting you get a spirit-helper, to be your medicine. I have thought of the young men who came back from fasting and told of spirit-helpers that promised them power and protection. I have thought that maybe they only told a story and had talked with no spirit-helper. Some of them have died in battle, defeated and forgotten. It was as though they had no spirit-helpers. Now I, Tall Hawk — I have tried to do things right. I have tried to do them in a hard way, the way of the old times."

He fell down in the shadow, rather than stretched out. He lay on his face.

The camp seemed years away instead of days. The face of his father, the chief, was dim in his mind. So were the faces of the boys with whom he had ridden and hunted, the girls who turned shyly away when Tall Hawk was near. They were like people of whom he had heard old tales, not people he had known.

Because they were so strange and hard to remember, perhaps the spirit-folk would be nearer. Tall Hawk beat down his hunger and thirst, his weakness, to yearn again for the coming of a spirit. Which one would it be? The wise Coyote? The strong Buffalo? One of the strangely gifted Birds? The secret Spider, the nimble Grasshopper? He felt like the last person alive in the world. His helper had better come soon. He closed his hot eyes.

"Help me," he prayed. "You know how to help me better than I can ask. I will pray no more."

Dully he seemed to lie, to slump there. Now the helper must come — now, or —

"*Hai-ya*, Tall Hawk."

He started. It was like hearing a voice in a dream, and wakening. He rose on a weak elbow.

"You fasted the right way," said the voice, close to him but almost unhearably soft. "Those others don't fast as they should. I will help you."

The grass moved, almost in front of Tall Hawk's face. Something was there, stirring in the grass, as a prairie chicken stirs. He gazed at it, dreamily.

"You were meant to come here, Tall Hawk. You fasted as the Ancient Ones fasted, the First People. You have earned my help."

"Where — " began Tall Hawk, in a croaking, dried voice.

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The grass moved again. Through its crossed stems he saw something round and pale, set with dark, dim holes for eyes.

He felt as though a sudden cold wind had struck him. He moved backward, on his knees and elbows, staring.

"You look like a skull," he croaked, and tried to get up.

"Don't be afraid."

The grinning teeth had moved, as though to let out the soft voice. The shadowy, empty eyes fixed his. Tall Hawk felt his weak limbs grow slack, and he hid his face on the earth.

"Long ago," the soft voice came to him, "I was afraid of dead bones, too. That was when I was alive like you." A pause. "Now I am buried here. In this knoll. I have waited for the call of someone like you, who had earned my help."

"Maybe I'm dying," said Tall Hawk. "Maybe that's why I hear and see a dead ghost."

"No. You will not die."

He raised his head again. The face of bones had pulled back out of sight in the grass. He looked for it.

"I have lain here for many, many times an old man's life," said the voice, still as soft as a remembered voice in a man's heart. "I was a chief's daughter of the Ancient Ones, as you, Tall Hawk, are a chief's son of your people. It was for you I have waited."

Tall Hawk had heard tales of the Ancient Ones, his own tribe's fathers, who had come from the North and found the country when no people had ever lived there before them. His head spun, and he closed his eyes.

"Is this true?" he mumbled, as one asks when a wonderful thing is said and needs repeating.

"I tell no lie," said the soft voice.

That was the assurance he wanted. But still he found it hard to look and see the skull-face again.

"I did not live to marry and be the mother of children," she went on. "I was young when I died, and knew nothing. But wisdom has grown in me during those long lifetimes I lay still and waited. Rise on your feet."

He managed. He stood tottering, his heart sick within him.

"Drink where your pony drinks."

Staggering to the pool, he dropped down and sipped a little. Then he could rise on a knee. Red fruit grew on a vine beside him.

"Eat some, Tall Hawk."

He put two in his mouth. Instantly refreshed, he rose. Strength crept back through his arms, legs and body — enough to make him leap back from where the bone-face peered among the grass near him.

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"*Hai-ya*, I cannot help how I look. You will be a skull some day."

Angrily, Tall Hawk fought back his trembling.

"Now, sit down and listen. You are seventeen years old. I will make you strong and wise. You will be chief after your father."

"Is this true?" he appealed again.

"I tell no lie," came her assurance, soft but firm.

The words were wonderful to Tall Hawk. They helped to shove back his fear and wonder at the thing that spoke.

"My enemies — " he began eagerly.

"You will destroy them, of all tribes but one."

"What tribe shall I not conquer? The Piegans? The Tsi-tsi-chah? The Lakota?"

"The white men."

He frowned. "White men are few. They are a small tribe. They come to us one by one, years apart, to trade firedrink and iron weapons for our hides and furs."

"I don't understand white men," said the Ancient One. "I cannot promise you victory, I can only warn you. Be afraid of white men's ways. Don't drink their firedrink. Don't use their iron things."

"What is iron, anyway?" asked Tall Hawk.

"How can you or I know? It is something we never see, except in white men's hands. Your people and mine have used the stone and wood and bone and horn that has always been in the country. But iron — that is strange and unknown to us."

"It is strong and tough," said Tall Hawk. "It can be made sharp. Fire does not burn it."

"You must not touch it, Tall Hawk. You must be like the Ancient Ones who never heard of it, or I cannot help you."

"I understand that," he said.

"Don't hunt or fight with their iron knives and arrows. Don't eat from their iron kettles. Do you promise this?"

"I promise."

"Walk now to the mound where I was buried. Pull up grass with both your hands."

He did so. Fresh earth showed in two places — red like blood, and blue like a dull sky.

"Mix it in war paint when you fight. The earth is strong medicine."

War Hawk could believe that. Such things were supposed to happen when a young man fasted and found his helper. Indeed, he could believe all that the voice told him.

From the bundle slung across his pony's withers he took two deer blad-

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ders. He filled them with red earth and blue. "Now," he said, "will I be safe if I camp here?"

"While I am with you, yes."

He hobbled his pony. From his waist-pouch he took pemmican and ate it. He gathered buffalo chips for a fire, and brought out his flint and steel to strike a light.

"Don't use the white man's iron things," reminded the soft voice.

"*Hai-ya*, I won't."

Tall Hawk threw the steel off across the prairie. After it he tossed his trade knife of much-whetted iron. From his pouch he took another scrap of flint, and scraped the two pieces together until he got a spark to kindle his fire. As the sun set, he gathered more buffalo chips. They blazed into a cheerful light. He felt strong, happy. He looked around as his fire banished the gathering gloom.

Then —

"*Aweel*" he cried, startled and chilled.

For there was soundless motion around him. Pale shapes gathered in from all sides. A tongue of fire leaped up, and gleamed on white bone-faces, basket-ribbed chests, thin, naked-jointed arms.

Skeletons — Tall Hawk rose on his knee, staring.

"They are your friends," the Ancient One's soft voice bade him.

He still stared around at the shapes. They faded back from him.

"They want to see you and know you. Remember they are Ancient Ones, like me. They have been long dead. They will help to guard you."

"I am thankful," he said, as politely as he could, and succeeded in making his voice ringingly deep.

But that was to conceal his dread. Skeletons for friends — would not living enemies, with blood and skin, be more comforting?

They were gone from around him now, vanishing from the night's gloom as water spots dry from a lodge cover.

"It is natural for you to be uneasy," his spirit-helper promised. "I will go. When you need me most, you will see me and hear my voice."

"I am thankful, Ancient One," said Tall Hawk again.

He dipped water in his palm, and ate more pemmican. In his heart he said a prayer of gratitude to the One Above. Tomorrow he would start the four day ride back to camp.

When he saw his people's lodges, like arrowpoints thrust up afar on the prairie, with the pony herd like a huddle of crickets, he laid his quirt to the flanks of his own pony. It was tired, but it loped in with him. As soon as he came within voice distance, he began to yell his joyous greeting.

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"*Hai, hai, hai-ya! Hai, hai!* I come, Tall Hawk, I return from my fasting!"

People looked up, their eyes wide in their brown faces, as he whirled into camp. He flung himself from his pony's back and pulled it up by the jaw-halter. He looked around at long, scared faces, with lines around the mouths.

"I am back alive!" said Tall Hawk. "Why are you afraid of me?"

As he spoke, he saw a lodge come down. Women stripped away the cover and bundled the poles.

"You return just in time," said a big brave whose name was Scar Nose. "We break camp, we are going to leave."

"Why? The hunting is good here."

"The Piegans are on the war path," said Scar Nose. "They killed some of our hunters this morning —"

"The Piegans!"

And Tall Hawk laughed a warrior's laugh. He remembered the promise that he would defeat his enemies.

"We'll tread them down like grass," he said. "My father will lead us —"

"Your father," interrupted Scar Nose in turn. "He was the first to fall when the Piegan war party struck."

And Tall Hawk looked toward his home lodge. A wail rose inside. He recognized his mother's mourning voice.

Men haltered their ponies. Women pulled down lodges.

"Who killed my father?" demanded Tall Hawk, in a deep, furious voice.

"The Piegan leader," said Scar Nose. "He was big and broad, and rode a spotted horse. He drove his ax to the lashings into your father's head — I saw him do it."

"The ax is there," added Bear Paw. He was the second chief, after Tall Hawk's father. He pointed to where the ax lay, beside the door of Tall Hawk's lodge.

Tall Hawk made a long stride and snatched up the ax. Blood had dried on its black stone blade. Its tough wooden handle was fringed with feathers, and bore a twisted thong at its end, so that the ax could serve as a quirt.

"It is a good weapon," came a soft whisper at his ear.

Tall Hawk spun around and yelled at the people, so loudly that they paused in their packing to look at him.

"Are the Piegans so strong and so many that they can drive us away without a blow against them in return?" he cried.

"This is Piegan hunting land —" began Bear Paw.

"All land belongs to the One Above," broke in Tall Hawk, as fiercely and loudly as though he were a chief himself. "Perhaps he is ready to give it to us."

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He tramped into the lodge. His mother sat with her robe over her head. She pulled it away and looked at him.

"You are hungry," she said. "There is food in the pot."

He stretched out his hand to take food, but drew it back. He remembered that the pot was of iron, traded from a white man years before. It was forbidden him.

"Not now," he said. "I am going after the Piegans."

"Paint your face," urged the soft voice at his ear.

He looked for a clay pot of water, dipped his fingers in. Then he shook red earth from one bladder into his wet palm and mixed it into paste.

"*Awee*, my son," whimpered his mother. "My husband is dead, must my son die also?"

With his thumb, Tall Hawk smeared long broad streaks upon his jaw and brow.

"A Piegan will die, not me," he replied. "A broad Piegan with a spotted horse."

"Good talk," praised the soft voice as Tall Hawk mixed some blue earth with more water and made blotches under his fierce eyes and along the bridge of his curved nose.

"But if you do not take food —" His mother lifted the iron pot.

"No," he said firmly. "Have meat roasted for me, not boiled, when I come back."

When he came out again, the ax in his fist, several warriors had gathered to gaze at him. His painted face scowled in red and blue. He walked away and slipped a halter on the jaw of his father's best pony.

"Look!" groaned Bear Paw, and made a gesture. "Here come the Piegans now!"

Across the prairie rode a sweeping line of Piegans, like a low-lying storm cloud. They raised their war shout as they spied the camp.

"Now we must fight," Tall Hawk said, and leaped upon his pony. Kicking its side, he galloped it at the Piegans. "*Hai! Hai!*" he whooped.

They sped at him, launching arrows that buzzed around him like wasps. Ahead of the others rode a big man on a spotted horse, jabbing with a lance.

Tall Hawk caught the lance in his free hand and drove down the ax into the Piegan's skull. The Piegan spun off of his horse, the ax wedged deep in his head. Tall Hawk kept his hold on the lance. Whirling it end for end, he stabbed another Piegan. The lance shaft snapped in half. With the broken stub Tall Hawk knocked yet a third from his pony.

The Piegans closed in with fierce yells. Tall Hawk's pony stumbled, but he sprang clear as it went down and stood with feet braced on the prairie.

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He gave his war cry, and knew, without seeing, a huddle of skeleton forms at his side.

"Courage!" whispered the voice he knew.

A screaming Piegan charged, struck down with his ax. Tall Hawk ducked away from the blow then vaulted up on the horse and clubbed its rider to the ground. "*Hai!*" he howled, and turned the horse to charge his enemies.

Scar Nose and several warriors at the camp, desperate in their danger, had hastily mounted and galloped out to face the Piegans. They saw Tall Hawk striking and flogging every enemy within reach with his broken lance-shaft.

"*Hai-ya!*" yelled Scar Nose, "let's go!" For one screaming moment the Piegan line held, then broke, first on the right, then on the left. Quirts rose and fell as the Piegans circled away and fled. Tall Hawk's warriors sent a few arrows after them, then yelled taunts and insults until no Piegan was seen on the whole of the prairie.

"How many dead Piegans?" asked somebody. "Count them. I see six."

"Tall Hawk struck them all," said Scar Nose. "Six! *Hai-ya!* He is as brave a warrior as his father."

Tall Hawk pretended not to listen. Sweat ran down his face, smearing the red and blue warpaint. He leaped down beside the big Piegan chief. He had no knife — at the command of the Ancient One, he had thrown away his iron knife, four days ago. Drawing the Piegan's elkhorn dagger, he sliced away the scalp. Waving it over his head, he raised the shrill scalp yell.

The others were rounding up the six ponies from which Tall Hawk had knocked the riders. "These ponies and scalps are Tall Hawk's," they kept saying. "*Hai-ya!* Was ever such a daring warrior?"

Scar Nose hurried ahead to tell the news in camp. Joyous after terror, the old women struck up a song about Tall Hawk. One of them brought out a drum and began to beat it. The young women danced and shouted and laughed. As Tall Hawk rode in, all this noise saluted his ears. The oldest men gathered around him when he dismounted, to grasp his hand and praise him.

"It was nothing," he said, as he was expected to say. "Do not speak of such a small thing."

He turned his back on the camp, walked twenty paces away, and sat down. He produced his pipe and lighted it. He pretended not to hear the excited jabber of council behind him.

"We must choose a new chief at once," said the oldest warrior.

"Bear Paw?" asked another, but the oldest warrior snorted.

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"*Awee*, Bear Paw stayed in camp when the others rode out and fought."

"Who then?" demanded the men. "Scar Nose?"

"No," said Scar Nose. "Who but Tall Hawk?"

"He is young," objected the oldest warrior.

"*Hai-ya*, the more years for him to lead us bravely."

Several voices seconded Scar Nose.

"He has come back from his fasting with a strong medicine!"

"*Hai-ya*, it is true, it must be that strength and wisdom were given him!"

"Let Tall Hawk be the chief!"

Now all of them were shouting for Tall Hawk. He heard, but sat as quietly as a picket pin driven into the prairie. He heard their moccasins coming through the grass. They stood around him.

"I said you would be chief after your father," breathed the soft voice at his ear.

Scar Nose spoke. "What does our new chief say?"

Tall Hawk got up. He shook the ashes from his pipe and looked around. He was silent for a moment. Then:

"Let's hunt. This good hunting land belongs to us now."

"*Hai-ya!*" they all cried. "Lead us where the hunting is good."

They prospered under their new chief, but sometimes they wondered about him, and sometimes they complained.

No doubt but that his medicine was strong, as strong as his heart. Tall Hawk would face and fight anything, on two legs or four.

People shuddered to hear of how he fought the grizzly bear in the Mountain-Foot Country — fought it and killed it with his knife of elkhorn. Not a scratch did Tall Hawk show, but he must have needed all his medicine to win. During that battle, said those who saw, lightning flashed across the sky, and a storm of hail made the summer day turn bitter cold.

Again, he had crept into the heart of a Ree Camp three nights running, to take scalps and steal weapons. The third night every Ree warrior had stayed awake to catch him. That was the night when a cyclonic wind laid flat the Ree lodges, and Tall Hawk escaped in the confusion with one more scalp reeking at his belt. Strange, the taletellers agreed, that no wind had blown anywhere else in all that region.

Then there was the story of his dare ride against a whole Pawnee band that was out looking for trouble and glory. Four Pawnees had Tall Hawk slain, with four great blows of his black stone ax. He had ridden away without a hair ruffled; but his pony died under him, shot through with twenty arrows, and of six warriors who had followed him on the dare ride only one

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came back alive. It was too bad, mourned the mothers of dead sons, that Tall Hawk could not or would not give some of his strong medicine to his followers.

For the rest, he did not live much like a chief. He had horses and weapons and food enough, but only one lodge, and no wife at all.

Thus it was when a white trader drove his wagon into camp. The white trader was shaggy on the face with brown hair, like a great bunch of dried grass. He wore strange-looking, strange-smelling clothes. Like all white men, he had shockingly bad manners; he spoke to those he did not know with a high, informal voice, and he grinned in his face-hair at the prettiest girls. He came to Tall Hawk, as chief, and offered him presents — a big iron knife in a sheath, a shiny iron cup, and a round wooden container, called a keg, of firedrink.

"I thank you," Tall Hawk said, "but no. I do not want the things."

The trader thought that Tall Hawk was being stubborn to get more gifts. He added a bright iron tomahawk, the back of the blade hollowed out for a pipe, and a gay, soft blanket. He tried to put these things into Tall Hawk's hands. But Tall Hawk flung up his palm in refusal, and glared so furiously that the trader took two steps back.

"I will not take them," said Tall Hawk. "You have permission to trade in my camp, but do not come near me."

Then Tall Hawk strode away and smoked his pipe, that was made of red stone.

The trader stared after him, and tugged at his face-hair, and said something in his own tongue that did not sound good. But the others came, eagerly giving buffalo robes and fox furs and other things for what he had in his wagon.

Later, when the trader's wagon had trundled away, Tall Hawk came and watched his warriors. They were happily replacing their stone arrowpoints with iron ones for which they had bartered. Tall Hawk stooped and gathered the best of the stone points, and the finest flint knife of those thrown away.

"It is strange for a young man to like such old-fashioned things," said Bear Paw to Scar Nose.

"And it is strange," replied Scar Nose, "that he does not marry."

For Tall Hawk listened when the prettiest girls sang songs about his bravery, but he did not smile or frown. When they gave him gifts — soft quill-worked moccasins, or quivers for his stone-headed arrows — he thanked them, and later on gave those things to other warriors. None of these actions would Tall Hawk explain, not even to his closest friends. His words were few and to the point, even for a chief. Sometimes they heard him muttering, apart by himself in the dusk. He seemed to say the words

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to a listener. They were not like the words of a lonely man talking to himself.

So did he sit once, smoking and withdrawn.

"Pay attention to what I say," said the skull at his ear.

He forced himself to turn and look into her fleshless face. It is good for a chief to conquer his terror.

"Think long before you speak to Scar Nose about marrying his daughter," the Ancient One breathed to him.

"Dawn Face is the prettiest girl in this camp," said Tall Hawk.

"In this camp and many others. No Pawnee or Piegan girl is prettier. Perhaps one of the Lakota — her name is Plover Call — is at least as pretty. But do you want Dawn Face?"

"Many think a chief should have a wife."

"But do you want her?"

"I think I want someone," said Tall Hawk. "My mother has died. I sit alone in my lodge at night. It is silent."

"Nobody is there with you," said the skull, bobbing in the dimness. "If somebody came, it might be bad. You have secrets you must not tell. You have rules you must not break. A wife might make you forget them."

"Sometimes I am not happy alone," Tall Hawk reminded.

"A chief must be unhappy for the sake of his people. It was like that with the Ancient Ones, when I was alive. It will be like that when the last chief leads the last people. You would be lonely even with Dawn Face, or another woman."

"Probably," agreed Tall Hawk. "Why do you know so much?"

"All my people talk about you, and say the same thing. They watch you. You are not always alone when you think you are. Look, my people are with us."

He knew that their bones stole close around him in the gloom. His heart, that did not tremble before beast or man, felt chilly and small.

"Their word is my word," said the skull at his ear. "Marriage is not forbidden you, but think long and well about it."

That night Tall Hawk led volunteers away to steal horses from the Tsi-tsi-chah.

But the white men kept coming.

Instead of singly, the traders appeared by twos, then by groups. Trappers killed out the beaver in streams and ponds. Hunters shot thousands of buffalo with their noisy fire-weapons, then took only the robes and wasted meat enough to feed everyone in the world.

And the white men did strange things, sometimes terrible things. Their bad manners could not be merely ignorance. They lied and stole. They

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talked about peace and friendship, then fought over trifles and killed men, sometimes women and children. They spoke unpleasantly to young girls, and tried to steal them.

Nobody knew what things they ate. Their clothing was not understandable clothing. They laughed insultingly when anybody mentioned the One Above. The hair on their faces and bodies made them seem like strange animals.

They had been endured while they were so few and came so seldom. But, *hai-ya*, too many were coming into the country now.

Tall Hawk was 30 years old, and had been chief for thirteen years, when Scar Nose and two other hunters brought in a captive. It was a tired, thirsty Lakota brave, with blood on his face and his naked chest. He could barely stand or speak until Tall Hawk ordered a woman to give him water. Then he told his story, by words and signs.

"Many white men come," he informed Tall Hawk.

"*Hai-ya*, that is true. More come all the time. I don't like them."

"But these are very many, a whole tribe of white men. They have herds of horses and strings of wagons." The Lakota made the wagon-sign, revolving one hand around the other like a wheel on its axle.

"How many tens of white men?" asked Tall Hawk.

The Lakota touched his forehead and flung his hand out. He could not say the number.

"Like a herd of buffalo, or a swarm of grasshoppers," he said. "I could not count them. They bring their women and children."

"Women and children," echoed Tall Hawk grimly. "They are coming to this country to live and stay."

"Some of their hunters met some of ours. They quarrelled with us, over a dead buffalo. They killed nearly all of us. Only I got away, without a pony, and your braves caught me." The Lakota stood up straight, and glared with hot eyes. "How will you kill me?"

"Scar Nose," said Tall Hawk, "put this man in a lodge. The women will give him food. Let him rest, but guard him." He faced the others. "Now let me alone for a while."

They let him alone. They were used to that command. They watched as Tall Hawk put tobacco and shredded willow bark into his pipe. Scraping two flints, he lighted it. He walked off from the camp and sat down on the prairie. The sun was sinking. He smoked and waited.

"Help me, Ancient One," he muttered at last. "Many white men are coming."

"Have I not told you that I do not understand white men?" said the skull at his ear.

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"But they are many. They will take our land from us."

"Have I not said that I cannot give you victory over white men?"

"You did not say they would beat me," he reminded.

"No, I did not say. I don't know what will happen if you fight them. It will be your saying and doing, your living and dying."

He blew a cloud of smoke. "*Hai-ya*, what if I die fighting them?"

"You will become like me."

In the dusk he made himself turn and look at her skull.

"I will be in the Dead World?"

He commanded himself not to shudder.

"I am your spirit-helper, your medicine," she said softly. "That is while you are alive. When you die, we will be together."

"I understand," he said, and rose and walked back to camp.

He smoked beside a fire inside his lodge. The fire burned down to coals, then to ashes. Tall Hawk sat there. He did not sleep. At dawn he came out, his brown face drawn and stern, like the face of a weary hawk. He called for warriors to bring the Lakota captive.

"You will take my best pony," he told the Lakota. "You will ride back to your people."

The listening warriors sniffed their surprise. The Lakota frowned, as though he did not understand.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"I tell no lie. Give your chief a message from Tall Hawk."

"What message?"

"It is time," said Tall Hawk, "for all tribes to forget wars and quarrels. *Hai-ya*, we are of different names and speak different tongues. But against the white man, we should be brothers."

"When I say that, what then?" asked the Lakota.

"I, Tall Hawk, promise by my medicine to stand by your chief as a friend if he stands by me as a friend. I, Tall Hawk, will say the same to chiefs of other tribes. We can fight as one people against these white men."

He paused. His warriors stirred nervously. Scar Nose and Bear Paw looked at each other, plaintive with the new thoughts. The Lakota kept his face motionless, and nodded.

"That is good talk," he said.

Tall Hawk knew that his own people must enter the new plan with him, and actively. He turned toward Scar Nose. "Are you brave? Will you say the same thing to the Pawnees?"

Scar Nose stood straight. He had digested the new thoughts.

"If I can talk fast enough before they kill me, I will speak that message."

"Who will say the same thing to the Piegans?" asked Tall Hawk.

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"I will say it," Bear Paw announced. "Some people think I am a coward, because I did not ride against the Piegans that time long ago. Now I will seek them, and make them hear your words."

"And who will go to the Tsi-tsi-chah?" asked Tall Hawk.

"The Lakota and the Tsi-tsi-chah have friendship," said the Lakota helpfully. "After speaking to my chief, I will speak to theirs."

"Then ride, all of you," Tall Hawk commanded them. "We will break camp here and move away before the white men's wagons. Where we stop, we will burn four fires to make four smokes. That is the signal that has not burned in my lifetime, but I have heard it talked about. It means a council of all tribes, forgetting their quarrels."

Tall Hawk's people fled their fastest for two days, moving far ahead of the whites. Then they made camp, and women kindled the four smokes. Hunting parties rode out, killing buffalo and dragging back the slaughtered carcasses. They waited all night. The next afternoon, they saw the other peoples coming, long snakes of them, from different directions.

Each of the visiting tribes stopped well away to pitch camp. Its boys herded the ponies rigorously and separately. Braves watched each other, but did not speak or make signs. Tall Hawk sent messengers to point out the dead buffalo, and parties of squaws came, politely shy, to cut up the meat. Then Scar Nose arrived to say that the other chiefs were coming to visit Tall Hawk, and he went out of his camp, on foot, to meet them.

The Lakota chief and the Tsi-tsi-chah chief arrived together, on their finest ponies and clad in their most elaborately fringed and painted shirts, leggins and moccasins. The headbands of their warbonnets were crowded thick with eagle plumes, each tufted with red floss, and in their hands they bore decorated weapons. Behind followed the Piegan chief, as broad as that Piegan Tall Hawk had killed long ago. The horns at the temples of his warbonnet made him look like a buffalo bull. Last of all rode the Pawnee chief, lean and straight as a lance, with his hair trimmed to rise in a bristly mane. Each chief was escorted by young men, like guards.

Tall Hawk wore plain moccasins and breech clout, and his naked body bore no paint. In his black hair he carried a single eagle feather, and he lifted a hand to show that he bore no weapon.

"*How kola*," the Lakota chief greeted him in a deep, ceremonial voice.

"*Hoh k-ah-hey*," said the Tsi-tsi-chah chief.

The Piegan and the Pawnee addressed him in the fashion of their tribes. All of them dismounted. The young men held the ponies. With his own hands, Tall Hawk gathered dried willow scrub and buffalo chips, and kindled a small fire. The four chiefs sat around it with him.

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Lighting his pipe, Tall Hawk puffed and handed it to the Lakota chief, who puffed and silently passed it along. The pipe made the circle of the chiefs and returned to Tall Hawk. The Lakota broke the silence at last.

"Brothers, I don't know how to make this talk," he said, in his deep voice of ceremony. "With my Tsi-tsi-chah brother, I have a treaty of friendship. But I have known nothing but fighting with the rest of you."

"*Hai-ya*, that is true," agreed Tall Hawk, gravely polite.

"Brothers, one of my sons died in war with the Piegans, another was killed by raiding Pawnees," went on the Lakota. "The third died in war with your young men, Tall Hawk. Now I have left only a daughter, Plover Call."

"Brother, they say your daughter is beautiful," rejoined Tall Hawk appropriately. "They say your sons were brave. Brother, I wish they lived, to help fight these white men."

"The white men are very many," put in the Piegan.

"They are all the white men in the world, I think," added the Tsi-tsi-chah. "Brothers, the whole white tribe is coming."

"Then," said Tall Hawk, "if we kill them, no white men will be left to trouble us."

"Brother, can it be done?" asked the Pawnee.

"Brothers, all of our fighting men together might do it," insisted Tall Hawk confidently.

Each told the number of his warriors. Tall Hawk's band was the smallest. Among them all they had, perhaps, ten tens of tens.

"Brothers, who will lead this fighting?" asked Tall Hawk. "Our Lakota brother is the oldest among us, I think."

The Lakota flung out his brown hand to refuse the honor. "I do not understand white men's fighting."

"Brother, none of us understand white men's fighting," said the Pawnee. "Their fire-weapons are not to be understood."

"Tall Hawk made the plan for us to join together," said the Lakota. "Tall Hawk must lead."

"*Wagh*," assented the Tsi-tsi-chah.

"*Yuh*," the Pawnee added his approval.

The four visiting chiefs turned their eyes upon Tall Hawk. Despite their differences of dress and custom, they looked alike. They were all old, but vigorous, with dark, strong faces and good manners. Tall Hawk knew he was like them, too, though younger than any. His heart felt warm and strong toward them.

"If I speak to my young men, they will follow Tall Hawk," promised the Lakota.

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"Brother, is this true?" asked Tall Hawk.

"I tell no lie," answered the Lakota chief. "What do our other brothers say?"

The Piegan, the Pawnee and the Tsi-tsi-chah all grunted their agreement. Tall Hawk passed the pipe to the Lakota.

"Brothers," said Tall Hawk, "if I lead you and kill the white men, do we remain at peace?"

"Brothers, I must think of my young men," said the Pawnee. "They like to take scalps and capture horses. They will want to go to war later."

"My young men will want to be considered, too," seconded the Tsi-tsi-chah, putting out his hand for the pipe.

"Brothers, all young men like to fight," said the Piegan. "It was our way, too, when we were young."

"*Hai-ya*, that is true," said Tall Hawk cordially. "When this fight is over, we will take our camps apart again. We will live as we did before. Our young men can raid against each other, in their natural way."

The others all spoke their admiration of Tall Hawk's wisdom and understanding. The pipe went around as they agreed to separate and carry on their accustomed wars, when once the danger of the white men was over.

"Brothers, this has been good talk," said the Lakota chief at last. "Come, let's go together. Let's visit each camp and tell our people what we have decided."

Tall Hawk called for a woman to put out the council fire. He went with his four guests to the Pawnee camp, where the subchiefs heard the news and whooped their approval. After that, they went to visit the Piegans, and then the Tsi-tsi-chah. By the time they approached the Lakota camp, a new spirit had come upon all the camps.

The various peoples were no longer shy with each other. The young men rode out on their best ponies, challenging each other to race. They galloped across the prairie, betting all they had on the swiftest riders. The strongest men among them defied each other to wrestle, and there were some fierce, panting tumbles on the grass, but nobody became angry. The women strolled here and there, from camp to camp, and chattered of the things that interest women. With them went the smaller children, at first eyeing each other gravely, then entering into games. Here and there raced and romped the many dogs of all five camps.

"This proves that we can meet as brothers when there is a reason for it," said Tall Hawk, as the Lakota chief summoned his advisers to stand together in front of his lodge.

The advisers listened to their chief. "All of us will fight together like friends this once," he said. "Tall Hawk here will be chief over all our war

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parties." He laid his hand on Tall Hawk's shoulder. "His heart is strong, and his medicine protects him against weapons."

"*How!*" cried a subchief. "Is this true?"

"I tell no lie," said the Lakota chief.

Tall Hawk turned away, as a polite man should, from all this praise. Somebody came out of the chief's lodge, into his sight.

The firelight from within showed her to be a slender girl, draped in a robe of soft furs. Her braids of hair gleamed as black as newburnt willow wood. She did not giggle or hide her face. She smiled at Tall Hawk, and he knew that she was Plover Call, prettier than Dawn Face.

"Let's have scouts ride out tonight," the Tsi-tsi-chah chief was saying. "They can warn us when the white people come."

"That won't be for a time yet," the Lakota chief said. "There won't be a fight tomorrow. Tomorrow, let all of you eat here at my camp."

"Good, said the Piegan.

The Lakota chief spoke to his nearest braves. "I wish I had a man like Tall Hawk for my son," he said.

Tall Hawk gazed at Plover Call, and Plover Call gazed at Tall Hawk.

Alone he sat on the prairie near his own camp, smoking. The fires burned here and there, in the other camps. He heard voices, high and cheerful. His young men had gone to the other camps to speak to the old men and look at the young women. Young men from the other camps had come to his for the same purpose.

The skull spoke at his ear. "I can promise no protection against the white men, Tall Hawk."

"Ancient One, you spoke truth about Plover Call," he said, puffing smoke. "She is prettier than Dawn Face."

"Will you marry her?" asked the voice, and it wanted to know.

"The fighting comes first. If I die —"

"If you die, you come to us Ancient Ones."

He banished his thoughts of their quietly stealing bones. He thought of Plover Call.

"Will Plover Call protect you against the white men?" asked the skull at his ear. "Should you not think of the battle?"

"*Awee!*" he protested sharply. "To think of young women is natural to young men. I am a chief, but not old. And Plover Call is prettier than any girl I ever saw. I like to think about her." He scowled over his pipe in the darkness. "And she thinks about me, I believe."

"That is true," said the skull. "She says in her heart that you are strong and handsome. She has no thought that you may die fighting white men."

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"Maybe I won't die," he growled.

"You will die. Plover Call will die. You will be bones. You will be skulls, like me."

He stared into her shadowy, empty eyes. He refused to be afraid or worried. He was angry with the skull of the Ancient One.

"Of course we will die. But perhaps white men will die first. Perhaps I will return alive from the fight. Perhaps I will marry Plover Call and have a peace treaty with the Lakota, my young men fighting only with the Piegans and Pawnees."

"Perhaps," echoed the soft voice. "Perhaps. Perhaps."

The voice died away. "Perhaps," it said faintly. "Perhaps."

He walked back to his camp and entered his lodge. He lay awake far into the night, but when he slept, he dreamed of Plover Call.

The next day he dressed in the finest buckskins he owned, mounted his best pony, and rode out to meet the other chiefs.

Between the Lakota camp and his own, most of the young people had gathered from all the tribes. Overnight they had become friends, and now they danced together. It was a good, lively dance, with at least ten drums throbbing out a rhythm. The young warriors had forborne to bring out their scalp sticks, for the scalps on those sticks might be recognized here and there by friends or relatives; but they made up for this lack by donning their most elaborately fringed garments, their gaudiest paint, their handsomest feathers.

In the dance, the young men vied with each other for leaps, writhings and whirlings. They encouraged each other with loud yells and whoops. There were enough dancers to make a good war party. Around them stood a close circle of young women, three tens of tens. At first these young women remained motionless and shyly watchful; but at last the rhythmic beat of the drums drove into their blood, and they began to move sidewise, still keeping their circle, their feet pacing slowly, their faces turned inward toward the leaping, whirling young men.

Tall Hawk reined in to watch for a moment. He looked for Plover Call in the outer circle, but he did not see her. She would have stood out in that circle, like a bright flower in a ring of weeds. He rode on, to the Lakota camp.

The other chiefs greeted him, in high friendly voices instead of the deep, measured voices of strangers. The Lakota chief himself helped Tall Hawk to dismount, and led him to a sitting place on a buffalo robe. Old women, the best cooks, came eagerly forward to serve the meat. But not all were old — Tall Hawk, looking up at the woman who came and stooped down to offer him food, saw the face of Plover Call.

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"Look here, Tall Hawk," said the Lakota chief, "we have some of the white men's firedrink, traded for a year ago. Perhaps, if we drink it, we will get some of their strong fighting medicine."

"I thank you," said Tall Hawk. "I do not use the firedrink. Use it, you others."

He watched Plover Call's grave, beautiful face. He gnawed the meat from a hump rib she had brought him.

"It is good," he praised the cooking.

"Maybe Tall Hawk wants more. There is plenty."

"More would be good," nodded Tall Hawk and the girl brought him another hump rib.

"Does my brother like the meat cooked by my daughter?" asked the Lakota chief.

Tall Hawk swallowed the last bite of the delicious buffalo meat.

"Yes, brother. It is sweet to the mouth. And," he stared straight into the grave eyes of the girl, "Plover Call is the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

Plover Call looked back at him, not with the silly stare of a young girl, but seriously, pleased, pretending no false fright. Then she moved away to get meat for another chief.

Now Tall Hawk could see the pot that held the meat. It was a big pot, made of iron, bartered from some white trade. Far away he thought he heard the whisper of the skull. He half-rose.

"Does my brother want something?" asked the Lakota. Plover Call turned from the chief of the Piegans and looked anxiously at Tall Hawk.

Tall Hawk sat again. "I was sitting on a pebble," he smiled. "I did but move away from it."

He heard no more the weak whisper of the skull.

Then there was a loud galloping, and the sound of voices, louder than the noise of the dancers. The scouts rode in and flung themselves from their ponies.

The chiefs rose to listen. Swiftly the scouts talked. The white men's wagons were coming. They were only two hours away. The Lakota chief thundered commands. The dancers broke away from each other, and ran in all directions for their weapons and ponies.

"Where do we meet, brother?" the Tsi-tsi-chah asked Tall Hawk.

Tall Hawk pointed the way past the camps. "There. I'll tell about the fight when we are all together with our men."

Back at his own camp, Tall Hawk sent Bear Paw to collect all the warriors. He went into his own lodge. No fire burned. It was gloomy.

"Help me, Ancient One," he said under his breath, and waited.

There was no sound, no voice in the dimness of the lodge. He sat alone.

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"I have eaten food from an iron pot," he said. "I did not know."

He waited again. There was no answer.

"I am not afraid for myself, but what about these allied peoples? Must they suffer defeat because of me?"

The silence remained. He looked around, straining his eyes for the faintest shadowy image of her deep-eyed skull. Never before had he truly wanted to see it, to hear the soft voice. He saw and heard nothing.

"*Awee*," he said. "I deserve this. I am careless. But I am not afraid."

He smeared red and blue paint upon his face. Around his neck he flung the necklace of grizzly bear claws he wore when he went to fight. He stripped away his handsome garments, and stood up naked except for breechclout and moccasins. Upon his head he set his warbonnet, a great mass of eagle plumes, with weasel tails hanging down at his temples. He caught up his black stone ax and hurried out. A young brave held his swiftest pony for him to mount.

Beyond the camps, the warriors of all the tribes formed lines of mounted men. Feathers tossed. Faces looked grim and brave and eager. They were good fighters, all of them. The chiefs waited for Tall Hawk, drawn together in a group.

"Ride to meet the wagons," commanded Tall Hawk. "Nobody must charge until I give the word."

The chiefs scattered, passing the command along. The assembled warriors rode forward, line after line of them. Up ahead the wagons came in view, a long snakelike procession.

Those wagons had covers, like lodges. They were drawn by white men's buffaloes with spotted skins. White men rode horses beside them. A scout, far out in advance, whooped a challenge.

"That should not have been done," grumbled the Tsi-tsi-chah chief. "Those wagons are getting ready to fight us."

The head wagon trundled to the side, then backward and around. The others hurried to follow. While Tall Hawk and the others watched, the wagons rolled into a great, closed circle and stopped. The spotted buffaloes were led inside the ring of wagons. The white men rode their horses inside, too.

Then loud cracks sounded, like the splitting of wood. Smoke puffed out between the wagons. The scouts came hurrying back.

"They have many fire-weapons," they reported.

"Let the warriors circle them, so far back that the fire-weapons can't reach them," commanded Tall Hawk. "Each chief will lead his own people. When I wave my ax, my warriors will yell. Then let everyone charge the white men."

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"Good talk, good talk," approved the other chiefs, riding away to form the big ring of warriors.

Tall Hawk said nothing, for the time a slow counter would need to count ten. Then he rode to his own party.

"Bear Paw, Scar Nose, you two will lead our young men. I want to stay back and watch how it goes."

"*Hai!*" cried Scar Nose happily, and rode to the front with Bear Paw.

The circle was complete. Tall Hawk silently raised his ax. All his men set up a chorused yell, that echoed around the great circle. From all sides, warriors rode in at the wagons.

Sitting back there alone, Tall Hawk watched. His blood raced. He yearned to be in that charge. Swift horses, gay warbonnets, waving weapons — it was a charge such as every warrior dreams of making. The war cries of all the tribes beat upon the wagons. Then —

There sounded a crackling like a fire of thornwood, but a hundred times louder. Smoke spouted out everywhere.

Horses fell, men whirled head over heels upon the ground. The noise of the fire-weapons drowned the war cries. For a breath's space, perhaps, the attackers were at the very wagons, close enough almost to touch. Then, in the next breath, they were riding back in all directions. The crackling noise flogged them along. Strung behind the flying riders lay the fallen. Some were still as stones, others writhed or tried to crawl away.

"Ancient One, I should have gone with them," whispered Tall Hawk. "They wanted me to lead, and I did not. I made an excuse. I was a coward."

Again out of fire-weapon range, the tribesmen made the ring again. Tall Hawk rode along the outside of the ring, questioning.

Many had fallen. Bear Paw and Scar Nose both lay close to the wagons. The Lakota chief was dead. The Piegan chief sprawled on a robe, shot through the stomach. The women would wail in all the camps that day.

Only the Tsi-tsi-chah and Pawnee chiefs still sat their ponies, full of fight.

"You fought them like a dare ride," pronounced Tall Hawk. "You came close, shot a few arrows, then ran back. That was not good. If every man had ridden in between the wagons, they could not have killed all of you before you got close enough to strike them, wipe them out."

"Nobody rode with us to show us how," protested the Pawnee, narrowing his eyes to look at the strewn bodies between him and the wagons.

Tall Hawk drew a deep breath, like one about to jump into cold water. "I will lead the next charge," he said.

There was silence. Everybody looked at him. He listened for a soft whisper next to his ear, of approval or dissent. He heard none.

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"Good," said the Tsi-tsi-chah after a moment. "Tall Hawk's medicine will not let him be struck down."

They counted the men. Nine tens of tens had ridden back safely. Men were sneaking out with ropes, dragging back the dead and wounded.

"Even if they kill another ten tens of us," went on Tall Hawk, "eight tens of tens can get inside the wagons. We'll leave no white men alive in the whole world."

"Good," said the Tsi-tsi-chah again.

"Will the Lakota and Piegan warriors choose new chiefs to lead them?" Tall Hawk asked.

"You will lead us all," said a Lakota brave.

He rode out in front of his own part of the circle. He spoke under his breath.

"You do not talk to me, but perhaps you hear me," he addressed the Ancient One. "I am riding out there to fight, and maybe to die. Maybe you want me to die, to be bones like you and your people."

He flung up his ax. The yell rose. He urged his pony forward.

"*Hai! Hai! Hai!*" whooped his young men, racing after him.

The air sang, full of the things the fire-weapons threw. The wagons seemed to rush at him from in front. He saw patches sewn on their covers, he saw the wood and iron of their wheels, the hairy heads of white men around and under them. He smelled the smoke of the fire-weapons, sweet and pungent.

He was almost there. A few leaps of his pony, and he would be within ax reach —

All in an eyewink of time, half a dozen giant clubs seemed to smite him. He was hurled back as his pony sprang from under him. He had time to wonder how hard he would fall on the ground, but not time to find out.

Dawn made pink light on the prairie. He lay dreamily.

"Get up, Tall Hawk," said the voice he knew, but clearer than he had ever heard it.

Obediently he rose. He was in a buffalo wallow. Around the wallow stretched empty prairie. He saw no wagons or camps or warriors. At his feet lay something silent, covered by hasty armfuls of buffalo grass. That was how men covered a dead friend, to hide his body from enemies looking for scalps.

"The fight —" began Tall Hawk.

"When you fell, everyone ran. The tribes struck their camps and got away. The white men rolled their wagons after them."

He gazed down at the grass-covered thing.

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"That is your body. Only your body. Now you are with me, Tall Hawk, as I told you would happen. We Ancient Ones welcome you."

Hai-ya, he had guessed this. He braced himself to see the moving bones come around him. He turned toward the voice, and cried out in wonder.

She stood taller for a woman than he for a man, but slim and young and smiling. Her black hair hung about her shoulders, not in braids but in a soft, glossy cloud. Her temples wore a band, sewn over with bright blue stones. Her dark eyes met his, and they smiled. She was beautiful.

"But my Ancient One is a skull!" stammered Tall Hawk. "Her people are fleshless bones, that steal quietly close —"

A chief was walking toward him, with a hand held out in welcome. On the chief's arm glowed a bracelet of red, shiny stuff. His backswept hair wore green feathers. On his deep chest rode a necklace of many-colored beads. Other people came with him, smiling. They were beautiful men and women, but none so beautiful as she who stood nearest Tall Hawk.

"You know my daughter," said the chief. "The rest of us know you. We want you to be one of us."

A hand was on Tall Hawk's arm. "My name is Maia," said the soft voice.

"In that fight you learned something about the white man's way of war," the chief of the Ancient Ones went on.

"I failed," said Tall Hawk bitterly.

"You learned," said the chief again. "You gathered new wisdom."

"Perhaps I could help some other young brave," Tall Hawk suggested. "One whose heart is strong, whose head is wise, who fasts properly."

"You can do more than that," said Maia softly.

Tall Hawk looked around at the people. "This is a new thing," he said. "I am not used to it yet. I thought you Ancient Ones were only bones. I am dead now — that makes the difference."

"No, Tall Hawk," said Maia's soft voice. "You are alive now, more alive than ever before. That makes the difference."

"And you," said Tall Hawk to Maia's father, "are the chief. Am I to be of your people?"

"We are to be of your people," replied the other. "You are the chief."

"I!" cried Tall Hawk, utterly amazed. "Is this true?"

"I tell no lie. Your wisdom is about things in the world today. The old wisdom is not as great as the new wisdom. You will command us how to give our help to the young warriors."

Strength and happiness swelled up in Tall Hawk. He stood straight and mighty. He tried to crease his brows in a formal scowl, but he smiled. He could not help it. "*Hai-ya!*" he cried out. "My people!"

"*Hai-ya!*" Their one voice answered him. "Tall Hawk, our chief!"

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The good Dr. Vrees, that best-intentioned of psychiatrists, had an unfortunate experience in the nighttime. It was a sad blow to his ego but he could console himself with the surety that he, even more than Dr. Freud, knew precisely the "stuff that dreams are made on."

Labor Supply

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

"THEY DO WHAT?" Dr. Vrees said, conscious of inanity.

His patient was a large young man. During the thorough physical checkup prior to this psychiatric questioning, Dr. Vrees had decided, with all the dolor of a spindly man, that this Robert Smith was a truly amazing physical specimen. He was muscled like a stereotype picture of a Viking, and with lean cow-hand hips. There were six feet four inches of him, and every inch in a perfect bloom of health.

Robert Smith seemed lost in some dismal private thought.

"They do what?" Dr. Vrees repeated.

"Huh? Oh, they go whoop, whoop, whoop. Sort of."

"In your dreams do these . . . uh . . . whoops convey any meaning?"

"I guess I understand them all right. Or *we* understand them, you might say, because I . . . we . . . keep working. And all the Ruths, too."

"All the Ruths," Dr. Vrees repeated mechanically. Just one Ruth was almost too much to contemplate. Dr. Vrees was highly aware of her, out there in the waiting room. Ruth Jones was as dark as Robert Smith was fair, and she was built on the same heroic scale. At least six feet tall, and proud of it, moving like a ship under a full head of sail. Just to look at her tall beauty, sensing the ripeness of her, made Dr. Vrees unhappily aware of his yen for tall women, a yen which was successfully canceled out by his refusal to look ridiculous in public.

Dr. Vrees was also aware that these new patients irritated him. His attitude, he knew, was unprofessional. If their only possession had been their physical beauty, he could have taken refuge in his own sense of intellectual superiority. But Vrees had gone through a series of standard tests and found that both of them were as bright as he was, which was very bright indeed. Smith was a highly successful young civil engineer. Both of them had inherited money. Their marriage was being delayed until this

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matter of the recurrent dreams could be straightened out. And that, in itself, was an indication of thoughtful emotional stability.

"Recurrent dreams are not unusual," Dr. Vrees said. "Most of them are the result of some physical disorder. The others, as evidences of emotional turmoil, are most often found in late childhood and early adolescence."

Robert Smith inspected the big knuckles on his right hand. "You can see what we're afraid of, Dr. Vrees. We're afraid that . . . somehow . . . Ruth and I react on each other the wrong way. There must be some strain there, or we wouldn't have these ridiculous dreams. We're very deeply in love."

"Neither of you has any physical ailment, Mr. Smith. I confess I've never examined a healthier pair. And your histories, too. Both from long-lived families who seem free of hereditary ailments. And both from very large families, too."

Smith flushed. "We hope to have at least a dozen kids, Doctor."

"I'm sure you will," Vrees said hastily.

Smith went on, slowly. "We talked it over. Gosh, we've talked this dream stuff over a hundred times. I suppose you doctors are accustomed to dig down into people's pasts and find out the root cause of . . . emotional trouble. Both Ruth and I had the happiest childhoods imaginable. And then, six months ago, these dreams started. I had them first. I told Ruth about them. Like a joke, you know. And then she started to have them."

"That's unusual, Robert, but not improbable. She began to worry about you. Out of sympathy, she duplicates your dreams."

"There's something pretty nasty about these dreams," Robert said heavily.

Vrees made a few meaningless marks on his notebook. "Well, suppose you go out and send Ruth in and I'll question her for a while."

"Okay, doctor." Smith got up, obviously glad that the interview was over. He held the door open for Ruth, closed it when she had entered the dimly lighted office.

Vrees was glad when she stopped towering over him and the desk and sat down. She seemed composed.

"Just tell me about these dreams in your own words, Miss Jones. I'll interrupt with questions when any occur to me."

She twisted her gloves, untwisted them. "There doesn't seem to be any pattern to them, exactly. And they aren't all really alike. Just the place is alike every time. So very hot, you know. And have you ever looked in one of those mirrors where you can duplicate yourself, so you see a whole line, and they're all you?"

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"Of course."

"That's the way it is. There are just hundreds and thousands of me, and of Robert too. And working so terribly hard. All naked and toiling. And crying, sometimes. There are corridors, and you have to walk down them all bent over. But the new corridors are better. You can stand up in those. We're making them."

"With what tools?"

"The tools are easy. Like gold pencils with two little clocks on one side. They cut the stone and the stone is all blue. Really blue. Cobalt, I guess. And the stones have to be put in baskets. Those baskets hang in the air and when you load them up they sink almost to the floor. When you pull the first one, all the others follow it like . . . animals. And we have to dump them down a dark place. You never hear them hit bottom."

"You say you are duplicated almost endlessly. Do you always see things from the viewpoint of . . . any specific duplication of yourself?"

"No. It is always different, but still *me*, you understand. Sometimes it changes a lot of times in the same dream."

"But you have to perform this labor?"

"Oh, yes. They won't let you stop. If you stop, they have a flicking, stinging thing that you can't even see them use. It hurts, terribly. I scream when they use it."

"Can you describe these . . . overseers?"

"This . . . sounds so terribly silly. They're . . . gnomes. You know. Little gnarly men with squatty legs and lumpy red faces and hats that come to peaks and they wear soft green. I used to love fairy tales, and the gnomes were my favorites. Now . . . I hate them. I hate them!"

"Please, Miss Jones. Don't let it excite you. We'll find a way out of this."

"Oh, I hope so."

"These little . . . ah . . . men, they speak to you?"

"They make a funny sound."

"Can you describe it?"

"Sort of whoop, whoop."

"I see," Vrees said. "Whoop, whoop." The girl gave him a sharp look, and flushed, then began glove-twisting again.

Vrees said, "We mustn't overlook the possibility of some sort of . . . ah . . . sexual connotation here. I mean, if both of you are rigorously sublimating your normal instincts toward each other . . ."

"In the dreams they herd us into a sleeping place. There's a feeding place, where we eat something wet and gray, and then there's a sleeping place. And in the sleeping place all those thousands of Roberts and the thousands of me, we all . . ." She covered her eyes, sat with her head bowed.

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Vrees swallowed hard. "I was discussing the question of sublimation."

She lifted her head in a regal way. "No. We aren't sublimating anything."

"Now, to go on to another point. You didn't start having these dreams until Robert began telling you about them, in detail."

"That is correct. But you see, I dreamed details which he hadn't dreamed yet. Then later, he'd dream those same details. Like a place where three new corridors branch off, not far from the feeding place."

"Ah, but you told him the new details and then he would dream them!"

"You mean, I influenced him by telling him? We wondered about that, too. So we started writing down new things we saw in the dreams, and not telling each other. Then we compared notes quite a while later. They matched, almost perfectly."

Vrees smiled. "Of course, my dear. You see, you two people are very close. Some day we will be able to pin down more closely this business of thought transference. There is a channel between your mind and Robert's. I think that is quite evident."

The girl nodded, dubiously.

Vrees went on. "There are many cases on record. I try to keep an open mind. Often you will find that identical twins have that faculty to a higher degree than the rest of us. There is the classic case of the twin sister who was on the *Lusitania*, and her sister in New York dreamed the entire disaster in precise detail and it was such a shock to her that she wrote it all down the moment she awakened. Later it was found to match the eye-witness reports with astounding accuracy. If I were you, Miss Jones, I should not worry too much about your both dreaming the same thing. Our purpose here is to find out why Robert started having these dreams in the first place. Once we find that reason, and eliminate it, I am positive that you will both stop having the dreams."

"We've worried so much about it."

"They do sound ominously realistic, I grant you. Frightening."

She straightened out her gloves. "I don't know if this means anything, Dr. Vrees, but you see, I've been having the dreams for five months. With Robert, it's nearly six. And . . . lately . . . well, maybe it isn't important."

"Please go on, my dear."

She lifted her chin and said, almost defiantly, "In the dreams, all of my . . . duplicates are quite obviously pregnant."

Vrees closed his mouth after an unprofessional interval. He said, "A vague theory begins to present itself. Robert states that he had a happy childhood, that he enjoyed being a member of such a large family. Eleven children, weren't there?"

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"That's correct."

"Let us assume for a moment that, subconsciously, he did not like being a part of a large family at all, that he resented all the others for . . . diluting the love his parents could have given to him alone."

"But Robert isn't . . ."

"Just a moment. Let me follow through on this. He sees a horrid dream world where your love for him is diluted in a similar fashion. I do not yet understand the symbolism of all of the duplications of him, and of yourself, but I feel that our method of approach is through psychoanalysis. I can give him two afternoons a week, a two hour session each time. I shall try to uncover this childhood feeling of jealousy toward his brothers and sisters. You see how pregnancy comes in, don't you? Each time he saw his mother heavy with child, he knew that there would be yet another dilution of the amount of love she had to give."

"Yes, but . . ."

"Now I'll ask Robert to come in and the three of us will talk this over."

A month later, the analyst's couch having failed, sodium pentathol having uncovered nothing but further details of the dreams, Vrees was beginning to speculate about bringing in a colleague who had had a certain amount of success with hypnosis.

One day at lunch at his professional club, Vrees happened to sit with Louisoln, the physicist, and Cramer, another psychoanalyst. Out of common courtesy, Vrees wanted to avoid shop talk in front of Louisoln, but Cramer, having heard a bit of the Smith-Jones case, was eager to hear the latest developments, if any. In spite of his good intentions, Vrees found himself discussing the "hypothetical" case with a confidence so precarious that he was certain Cramer could see through it.

"What is this . . . duplication?" Louisoln asked.

"Just a dream, Doctor," Vrees explained. "A patient of mine has a recurring dream in which he sees himself endlessly duplicated, laboring in a sort of bondage to a bunch of gnomes."

Louisoln chuckled. "Duplication of matter. A pretty solution to the labor problem, no? Of course, if matter could be duplicated, the demand for labor would not be high, except for the most menial sort of work. For example, duplication of matter would be no good, if one wished a ditch dug."

Vrees laughed, a bit flatly, "You sound, Dr. Louisoln, as though duplication of matter was a possibility. To me the idea is quite shocking."

Louisoln raised one matted gray eyebrow. "Shocking? My boy, you are living with it, each day. I shall not go into the quantum theory."

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"Please don't," Cramer said, softening rudeness with a smile.

"But please, gentlemen, consider a phonograph record. Say the music, as such, is a substance. Using an electrical theory of matter, it is a substance. And it can be duplicated endlessly, by merely reproducing the same circumstances, a needle in a wax groove imparting an electrical impulse. With your kinescope the shadows of two dimensional television stars are also endlessly duplicated. So why should it be at all shocking to you, gentlemen, to fit your minds around the idea that if the electrical charges in the basic building blocks of matter can be precisely duplicated, the matter itself will be duplicated? It would take vast energy, of course, to work the mass-energy formula backwards, but inconceivable? No. Not at all." He gave them a leonine glare and delved back into his cheese cake.

It was then that Vrees began to live in mild fantasy. Louisoln's matter-of-fact statements gave idiotic credence to the Smith-Jones recurrent dream.

That afternoon, while listening to a well-upholstered matron relate, in doze-producing detail, an account of how, at the age of eleven, her half-sister had shoved her out of a cherry tree, breaking her collarbone, Vrees found himself playing the childhood game of "supposing."

Suppose the legends of gnomes have a basis in fact. Suppose they are underworld or otherworld creatures, far more advanced than man. Aren't there tales of humans being taken as slaves by them? Supposing these gnomes need more labor. A bigger supply. It would upset mankind too much to have a rash of thousands of disappearances. And then, of course, there would be the problem of selection of healthy specimens, good breeding stock, possessed of sufficient intelligence. Now if they could merely select two specimens with all the requirements, create endless duplicates, set them to work, wouldn't it be possible that some extrasensory thread might connect the souls of those duplicated and their hard-laboring counterparts who were underworld or, perhaps, otherworld. It could well be otherworld. There had been a rash of things in the sky. And where, even in the bowels of the earth, could you find cobalt blue rock?

"What do you think, Doctor? I'm still waiting?"

"Perhaps I can detect something significant, Madame, in the way you rephrase the question."

"I see. I'll ask it this way. Do you think there's any significance in the fact that it was a cherry tree I was pushed out of?"

Vrees groaned inwardly. "We have not yet reached the stage where we can discuss symbolism, Madame. If you would please continue."

A few days later Mr. Smith and Miss Jones sat in the doctor's office. They had come at once when myriad Doctors Vrees had appeared in their dreams.

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And Dr. Vrees had been expecting their call.

Although it was now dusk, he didn't turn on the lights. Mr. Smith and Miss Jones held hands. Tightly. Vrees had talked until his voice was husky. The avoidance of madness, he had found, was like working your way around and around the outside of a tall building, with your fingernails scratching the cornice.

Everything had been said, including the impossibility of trying to tell anyone else in the world.

They sat in silence. At last Vrees said, "I guess they decided they needed me to assist in the . . . ah . . . multiple births."

"And take care of the children, afterward, perhaps," Miss Jones said dreamily.

Vrees flinched inwardly. He smiled at all children, patted their heads and gave them gum. He detested them.

"Then there's nothing we can do, is there?" Robert asked.

"Nothing," Vrees said. "Perhaps, in time, as that . . . uh . . . regimentation causes an emotional and intellectual deviation from . . . our norms, the contact will gradually be broken."

Robert stood up. He said, "I guess Ruth and I better go ahead with the wedding. Will you come, Doctor?"

Again he winced inwardly. "Ah . . . I've a pretty full schedule."

"Of course," Ruth said. "We should all get together now and then, though, to sort of . . . check up."

"I'm prescribing sedatives for myself," Vrees said. "I intend to stop dreaming."

He walked them to the door. He could not help considering them his enemies. They had gotten him into this horror. And besides, they towered over him.

But he had to make some gesture.

At the door he said softly, so softly that they both had to bend down a little to hear him. "That sound they make. You . . . uh . . . were right. It's definitely whoop, whoop."

He sat alone in the dark after they had gone. He was an honest and objective man. Yet it took him an hour to isolate that final reason for his sense of bitterness. He realized it at last. Somewhere 1000 Drs. Vrees attended 10,000 Ruths. Yet, through an irony of selection, they were all as unattainable as the original Ruth was to the original Vrees. Anyway, they'd all be too busy with the children.

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Winona McClintic and this magazine made their debuts together: her first story, In the Days of Our Fathers, *appeared in our first issue, some three and a half years ago. That subtle study of a sterile future evoked as much mail as anything in the issue; and we venture to guess that her second story (Miss McClintic is not a prolific writer) will do the same. For McClintic is a highly individual craftsman, whose prose and thinking are not at all like those of any one else. Her work is not for devotees of the machine-made magazine story; but connoisseurs of off-trail fiction will find here a nobly absurd tale, imbued with an intimate understanding of professors of philology, their patient wives, their impatient superiors . . . and such protectors as a harried professor most needs! Like the logical and well-intentioned pranks of its leprechauns, the tale will, we think, "cause much merriment and confusion, both at home and abroad."*

There Did Not Remain a Word to Say

by WINONA McCLINTIC

PAT, MIKE, AND BRYAN O'RYAN, three leprechauns of good family, are in there sitting in a secret reference room in the Dublin Library. They have a bottle of scotch from which they would be taking small deochs now and again. They are observing, by their own devices, the actions of three students, young men in their flowering, learned men in languages, including the blessed Gaelic. These young men are across the ocean in Ameriky, where so many go from the old country, the potatoes there being plated with gold, or so the story runs.

Pat is reporting what he sees to the others, explaining at whiles to Bryan O'Ryan, who is not very bright, although he had been born with a caul.

"They do be in their going, darling," says Pat, "the both of them at the railway train and the third mounting and saying goodbye."

"O brathair," says Bryan O'Ryan, "and why must they be separating after enjoying so much their seminary together?"

"Sotach!" says Mike, "it *is* teachers they are now, of the beautiful Gaelic; therefore they must go to different colleges to find students. The

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one on the train is going to the west; the other two never expect to see him again."

"Will the Red Indians capture him and forbid him to wear the shamrock as well as other infamous tortures?" cries out Bryan O'Ryan.

"No, indeed, they will not," says Mike; "it is a female creature will capture him, with the sap running in the trees and him in his flowering."

"It is what does be happening to all scholars," says Pat sadly, "they leaving Fair Harvard and having nothing more to live for whatever."

"It does seem to be formal speech, like the hated English, to be calling him *Arthur*," says Mike; "let us put a less-ainm on him. In a few years his hairs will begin to decrease, he will have a tonsure like a laurel wreath; let us call him *Bald Art*."

"Go maith!" say the other two. And so it was done.

Bryan O'Ryan is gazing out of the window, singing cepocs in multiples of fifty. The other two are making shoes that curl up at the toes and tapping their little hammers in time to his singing. Suddenly Bryan O'Ryan speaks, and, as usual, astonishes and delights the others with his rare perception.

"Is Bald Art a good man?" he asks, smiling at his shadow which is frisking about the room.

"He is an innocent and a trusting man," says Pat, "and that, to some, is the same thing."

"He has a rare gift on him that the Saints gave him," says Mike, "and that is this one: that he could put the blarney of Munster on a radish."

"Are there radishes in California?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, shoving his shadow carelessly in his pocket, for he is rather untidy, though a darling in every way.

"There are students in California," says Pat, "and that, to some, is the same thing."

Bald Art was in the Botanical Gardens observing the radishes when he met the woman who was to become Mrs. Bald Art. He saw at once that she had Faith in Scholarship, so he turned around and put the blarney of Munster on her, and before she knew which end was up, they were married and living in a small shanty with lace curtains and a plant garden running by the door. Bald Art was of Very Low Academic Rank, a shameful condition indeed for a learned man, because he had not yet written a book. Sometimes in the evenings, sitting before the small fire with his bowl of gruel, for he was not yet acclimated to the economical diet of praties on which they subsisted, Bald Art thought of writing a book, and how one goes about it. One begins with a title, for without that, it is not a book at

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all. Bald Art made up a list of 300 useful titles for books; this was all he did for the first year. Mrs. Bald Art tried to inspire him from time to time, but every time he set pen to paper, his mind turned to radishes and he wrote odes to them. Then he would go over to the Faculty Club and spend the afternoon telling naive scientists distressing puns about what one old Goth said to the other old Goth. He seemed an impossible man to inspire, but Mrs. Bald Art had Faith, and she awaited the day when he would be made a Full Professor and would write brilliant books on morphology and phrenology and other learned topics.

The three leprechauns are sitting in the Dublin Library, after the last librarian has taken off her glasses and stomped out for the night, to decide on a useful present to their protegee.

"What does Bald Art look like?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, with his usual affectionate interest in the external world.

"Rather like us, in a sort of way, darling," says Mike.

"Let us send him a toadstool to sit upon when he is not delivering learned lectures, then," says Bryan O'Ryan.

"Go maith!" say the other two. And so it was done.

When the toadstool arrived by afternoon post, Bald Art was highly interested in it, for he had never had anything like it. There was no doubt in his mind that it was a toadstool, for he had seen pictures of them in books; he did not realize that the size was enormous for a toadstool. In other books, of a different color, he had seen little men in red caps sitting on them, and he knew that this was their chief usefulness to mankind. Therefore, he at once tried his toadstool for size. And it was just right. He put it in a corner and called to his wife to come and see what someone had sent him.

"It's a plot," said Mrs. Bald Art, as soon as she was able to focus her eyes again. "Little men will climb out of it at night and take us by storm." Her Faith was a little shaken.

"It's a toadstool," said Bald Art happily, "for sitting on. Very useful to an academic career."

After a few weeks the toadstool became a part of their lives, and they hardly could remember how they had done without it. Except for trimming every spring and fall, the toadstool needed no care whatsoever, and dogs were kept away by the simple ruse of keeping the doors shut, which Bald Art remembered to do every now and then.

"What is Bald Art doing now, at this moment?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, who likes to keep in touch with reality.

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"He is teaching a class about languages," says Pat. "O it's a learned man he is! It is indeed a fine thing, now, to have knowledge on you of words and to be speaking in tongues, which he often does. Now he is telling the little ones what *Howard* means."

"And what might it mean?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, who likes to improve his mind whenever he can without strain.

"It means *hog-ward*," says Pat, "and now he is telling them what *Steward* means."

"And what is that?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, making rapid notes on an old cabbage leaf.

"It means *sty-ward*," says Pat.

"What is all this obsession Bald Art has with pigs?" says Mike with irritation. "He would not know what to do with a pig if he had one."

"Let us send him MacDatho's Pig," cries Bryan O'Ryan in a transport or frenzy. "We can tell him by wireless when to expect it, and he can use it in class as an example of hog- and sty-warding."

"Go maith!" say the other two. And so it was done.

That night, as Bald Art sat by his wireless set, he little knew that six eyes in Dublin were watching him, by their own devices. As he sat carelessly reading mediaeval manuscripts with his well-thumbed dictionary handy, gentle music assuaged his ears from the little brown box. Suddenly a sepulchral voice, hollow and compelling, floated over him like a sound-shift.

"Bald Art! Bald Art! Bald Art!" it said, being of folk-tale origin. "MacDatho's Pig will be delivered to you in ten days. Slan agat!"

Bald Art rose slowly from his chair like a man stabbed in the vitals. Then he absent-mindedly, with a stricken expression, tore out a handful of hair from the top of his head. Then he began to look up strong verbs in his dictionaries.

The next day, Bald Art went down to the Faculty Club and told everybody there that he was about to write a monograph on the Old Irish legends, adding mysteriously that he had discovered a famous relic, which would revolutionize scholarly research. The Faculty was greatly interested in his report, as his colleagues were all conventional men with obscure interests. A committee was formed at once, to handle wagers on whether or not a monograph would be written, and the Head of the Department swore on a stack of Otis and Needleman that Bald Art would be promoted at once, if he achieved publication by summer. The only member of the Faculty who seemed dubious was the other professor who shared the office with Bald Art at the University.

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"Pigs!" he said heartily, when Bald Art had told him about the monograph. "Ho ho ho! Yes, indeed!" But a thoughtful frown creased his brow as he put on his hat and went out into the rain. He went home and told his wife that Bald Art was off his trolley.

Bald Art made arrangements for a pen to be built in back of the Faculty Club, so that MacDatho's Pig would be happy and safe. Mrs. Bald Art had refused to have the Pig about the house, for, although she had her Faith in his ultimate success, she also had her standards. The pig-pen was finished in a week, and a banner was hung over the door, saying WELCOME TO THE VISITOR FROM THE EMERALD ISLE on a green field, gules, sinister.

Three days later, Bald Art received a telegram from New York, telling him that his Pig was being shipped, and asking for $300 for the mattress it had eaten on the ship. Three days after that, he got a telegram from Chicago, saying that his Pig had escaped but that they expected to recapture it shortly, and asking for $300 to pay for the arm of a porter named John Brown Moriarity. Another telegram arrived at the same time, asking about funeral arrangements for his poor Pig, which had rashly attacked a policeman named McTaggert, who was off duty at the time, but who fortunately carried a shillalegh whenever he entered a bar. It was during this period of strain that Bald Art, surmounting personal difficulties, wrote many lectures which he found useful in later years.

It was very difficult to explain at the Faculty Club that the monograph would not appear. Many of the professors were angry, for they had lost their wagers, and the Head of the Department threatened to make Bald Art spend all his time teaching punctuation to engineers. However, Mrs. Bald Art lost all her depression about the Pig at the mention of engineers, for this is a class of men never lacking lucrative employment. There seemed to be a Future in teaching engineers, and perhaps he could write a book about it. Bald Art refused point-blank to write a book about engineers.

"How about a book on Home Canning?" asked Mrs. Bald Art, trying to be inspirational. Bald Art went into the kitchen and looked at a can-opener, wondering how it was used. After several hours of fruitless endeavours to open a can, Bald Art decided that the can-opener would never replace the stirabout-pot. He went back to his toadstool and read Sanskrit folk-tales for the rest of the day. The Faculty used the deserted pig-pen as a handball court, and everyone was very kind to Bald Art and hoped that he would soon find something else to write about, pigs being a Lost Cause.

The leprechauns are laughing merrily over the failure of their gift; now they become more determined than ever to send Bald Art something which would encourage philology and further his academic career. St.

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Brendan's Isle has been sighted recently and the papers are full of it. They know that Bald Art would have read about it, for everyone in Ameriky reads the Dublin papers to see what is going on in the world. The leprechauns make up a publisher's catalogue, printed in the beloved Gaelic language, with advertisements on the back. The most noticeable one, designed to instruct the mind as well as to delight the eye, is a large, green-bordered message:

BUY THE ONLY ORIGINAL ST. BRENDAN'S ISLE! SEND ONLY $300 TO ADDRESS BELOW, WITH THREE PERSONAL REFERENCES. PEDIGREE FURNISHED UPON REQUEST.

When the booklet arrived, Bald Art was sitting upon his toadstool, reading his mail and groaning, for he had a cold and a headache. As his eyes brightened at the sight of this wonderful offer, Bald Art did not realize that six little eyes were watching, by their own devices. Calling for pen and paper, he immediately began writing on little slips of official stationery.

"What is the darling doing now?" asks Bryan O'Ryan, unable to read the handwriting, for it does not resemble any he has ever seen before. Mike, who is much older and therefore accustomed to scholars, answers him, "He is forging the signature of the President of Ameriky for reference."

When other signatures have been practiced, which Mike identifies as those of a deceased Pope and one Sir Walter Scott, Bart., the three little men see Bald Art seal the envelope, enclosing a check for the desired sum. Now the leprechauns perfect their plans, namely, to send their ward the famous legendary isle in many little boxes, advising him to piece the isle together in that way which seemed to him best. This would cause much merriment and confusion, both at home and abroad. Bryan O'Ryan is worried about the postal rates, for, he argues, St. Brendan's Isle, being under water much of the time, would be water-logged, and the dirt would be very expensive to ship.

"Now, darling," says Pat, "you would not be thinking that we would send water-logged dirt? Why, the journey to dig it up would be tedious, and when we would get there, we might find that the island was not there at all but gone by itself. We'll just send him some of the grand dirt we have in the backyard. It's fine Irish dirt and a credit to anyone possessing it, in large or small amounts."

"Throw in a little peat," suggests Mike, "to prove that it is the true Ould Sod."

"Go maith!" say the others. And so it was done.

When Bald Art told the men at the Faculty Club that he had ordered an island, excitement was rife. A committee was formed at once, with

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the plan of making it into a Bird-Refuge with a seed-pile and artistic bird-baths. The English Department spoke for the north end, and began to draw designs for Eighteenth Century "views" and "prospects" with waterfalls and sunny spots of greenery. A French professor with a small goatee suggested that the south end be reserved for sun-bathing and roulette. However, a professor of the sciences, who wanted to have the island to himself as a breeding-farm for Dusky-Footed Woodrats, became very angry at the selfishness of the others, and never forgave Bald Art or spoke to him politely again. He sneered, as his own book had already been published, and muttered in a stage-whisper that it was a good thing the Pig had not come, for Bald Art would have been mean to it. In the fight which followed this rudeness, two instructors in Spanish lost their front teeth and took to lisping, and one professor of the Calculus lost his drawers. Mrs. Bald Art, visiting her husband in the hospital where he was confined until the splints could be removed from his toes, was very cheerful, and told him that the College of Letters and Science was solidly behind him and wanted to make him a Dean.

Bald Art was sitting in his office, practicing Hottentot bilateral clicks, when the first box arrived. He set it against the wall happily, to wait until the rest of the isle came, so that he could assemble it. His monograph on the subject would contain special reference to Middle Irish texts. Several days later, it was difficult to enter the office because of the boxes filling the room. The desk was already piled high with books, pamphlets, booklets, monographs, leaflets, notes from students, notes from professors, boxes of Kleenex, and the hair which Bald Art tore out from time to time in moments of stress. The other professor asked Bald Art on the third day what the boxes contained. On being told that it was dirt, he maintained a discreet silence on the subject, and began to hold his office hours in the corridor outside. His own belief, he told his wife that night, was that Bald Art was off his rocker.

No one knows what would have happened eventually, if a janitor had not dropped a box, as he was moving them in order to sweep down the office late one night. Realizing that this was common dirt, the janitor immediately assumed that the boxes had been stacked there by mistake. He got them downstairs and outside, where they were picked up the next morning by gardeners and distributed among beds of flowers and shrubs. Bald Art, finding his island gone the next morning, came to the conclusion that it had assembled itself during the night and gone off to its ocean. He was indeed sorry to lose St. Brendan's Isle, and it was several years before he stopped lamenting the untimely loss of this legendary treasure.

Everyone agreed that it was a shame, and a great blow to scholarship,

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but, nevertheless, they had a Faculty Meeting about him. Many old scholars spoke with feeling about their disappointment; they had all wanted an island and they had been bitterly misled. A Speech professor with a nervous tic said that he, personally, felt that this was a hoax, and that Bald Art never intended to write a book or even a tiny monograph. The President looked grave and waggled his head in an intellectual gesture. The Head of the Department had his secretary write a formal warning, which she did with tears running down her cheeks and blotting the paper, saying that if Bald Art did not publish a book within three months, he would be demoted, or maybe even exiled to a Normal School. Mrs. Bald Art, after reading this warning, prepared for the worst and made arrangements to take in washing, for although she had Faith, she knew a crisis when she saw one.

It was the manuscript episode that the leprechauns regarded as their greatest joke, ever perpetrated on anyone anywhere at all. They sent Bald Art a series of letters from various learned men and scholars of all degrees. These letters related to a pile of manuscripts in the Dublin Library, all in authentic Middle Irish and all with marginal notes by the blessed St. Padraic himself. Signing the names of various authorities, the leprechauns agreed to send to California many pages of photostats. Bald Art asked by wire rather cautiously, how many pages they were willing to send, for the leprechauns had offered them absolutely free, postpaid, with a money-back guarantee, worthless, of course, in this case, but which added a businesslike note to the proceedings.

"How many should we send him, darling?" asks Pat, as he prepares to write a really convincing letter.

"How about a million?" says Bryan O'Ryan, who is always ready to encourage scholarship. "Or would that be too much work for us to handle?"

The other two leprechauns roar with laughter, shaking all the way down to their toes, which curl up at the ends and flutter like pennons.

"Say we'll send him three million, darling," says Mike, who possesses the unfortunate tendency of his race toward overstatement rather than the understatement which has made the Saxon people famous for their humor.

"Will he swallow such a story?" asks Pat, as he dips his feather in ink.

"He will that," says Mike, "for he's as gullible as Bryan O'Ryan here, with his questions concerning the work it will be for us."

"Nilim anois!" cries Bryan O'Ryan in a hurt voice, for he is sensitive, although a darling in every way. The other two soothe his ruffled feelings, and when the letter is finished, all know that they have entered upon a venture from which they cannot turn back.

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When the first pages of manuscript arrived, Bald Art began at once to decipher them. They appeared to be covered with hen-tracks, but Bald Art decided that they were runic letters, although somewhat modified, and he set to work to find out what they meant. After thirty-six hours of constant labor, pausing only to drink coffee and chew aspirin for his cold, Bald Art decided that the scribe, although normally left-handed, had written these pages with his right hand, because of some injury which rendered him helpless to write in his usual fashion. Admiring the courage possessed by this nameless poet, Bald Art copied the pages with his left hand. The result was disappointing at first glance, but on closer scrutiny, the last sentence was comprehensible, although in a crabbed and minute penmanship. The sentence read, "*Ni thardda do run do mnaib*," which, translated into the English, runs, "*Do not tell your secret to women.*" Bald Art vowed absolute secrecy upon the subject, and went to bed for three days, to cure his cold and to wait for the next pages to arrive. To celebrate this worthy beginning, there was a party at the Faculty Club with Morris Dances and hot glög. Mrs. Bald Art, who was with child at the time, was justified in her Faith; at last a book, written by her husband, would appear in second-hand book-stalls all over the world. She decided that her son would be an engineer, they being so successful in material gain and practical affairs.

The next pages came in a large heavy box. The delivery man, as Bald Art signed the receipt and paid three dollars charges for maundering, said there was a curse on the box, but he had always hated education ever since he was expelled from high school for pinching young ladies in the auditorium. So Bald Art dismissed the comment as mere superstition, and moved the box into the cellar for the night, which promised to be stormy. It was almost midnight when the earthquake struck the hapless inhabitants of the college town. The shock was slight and not much damage was gone, but the thunder, lightning, and heavy rain which followed showed Nature at Her Most Fearsome. The poltergeist in the box from Ireland was terrified out of its wits; it began to rock the box and bang blunt instruments on the side, and from time to time it uttered cries of "Ochone!" and "My woe it is, O Oisin, you to be away in Tir nan Og and me to be here in the Western Land!" These piteous outcries woke up the Bald Arts. They hovered about the box, murmuring soothing remarks and pouring hot tay through the lid to calm its nerves. They could not find hammers and crowbars, as the lights were out all over town, but they promised to let the poltergeist out in the morning before the sun cast its shadow on the Campanile.

However, the imprisoned guest soon fell into a fit of the mothers. The

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end of the matter was that the poltergeist went up in smoke and a loud bang and whimper, taking with it the box, the papers, and the cellar stairs, which fell like manna from the skies for three minutes thereafter. Along with the boards a page of manuscript fluttered to the floor of the devasted cellar. On it was a single line of runic writing, which when translated said, in effect, "Is fual duit-siu!" Bald Art, observing that this was a vulgar expression, decided that it could not be Gaelic, but must be some language closely resembling it but non-Indo-European in origin. Probably the poltergeist had written insulting remarks all the way up. Bald Art Jr., who was born three months after this with a full head of hair, drank nothing but tay until he was three years old.

Three days later another box arrived, this time a small one with a neat manuscript tied with a plaid ribbon. It came through the post, so it had stamps on it instead of a curse, and it looked like a safe thing to open. Bald Art put the manuscript down on the floor, and watched it carefully for a time. Then he knocked three times on the top of it and said "Are you there?" in loud slow tones the way philologists always talk. Nothing happened, so Bald Art turned the cover and read the first page. He had got to the bottom of the page before he realized that he had forgotten to translate it and so did not understand a word of it. Dismissing this mistake as a side-effect of fear and anticipation, Bald Art began to write down his translation on parchment.

It seemed to be a play concerning the rivalry and battles between the Clann Dubh and one MacBheathaig, a dictator with insomnia and a terrible guilt-complex. It started out rather well, Bald Art thought, with a scene on a heath with three banshees, speaking in couplets. Suddenly one of the banshees says, "I come, Graymalkin!"; and they go away. This word *graymalkin* could not be a Gaelic word, but was of foreign origin. Bald Art made a note of it, thinking that some day he might write a monolith on the subject. The next scene, involving some characters named Donnchadh, Maelcoluim, White Domhnull, and Attendants, was full of long speeches and dull. Bald Art finished translating the scene and went to bed, where he was tormented by wild dreams and a feeling that he had read the story once before, a long time ago.

Early the next morning he got up and studied the manuscript, although he had caught a cold from his uncomfortable night and was sneezing germs all over the Middle Irish. The third scene had the same three banshees again, talking about killing swine, which seemed to be the hobby of one of them. Making a note — *Lat.* suīnus; *O.N.* suīn; *A.S.*, *O.H.G.* swīn — Bald Art kept on with his work. Toward evening his suspicion, that he had read the play before, was fulfilled. He came upon the line:

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Sleep that do be knitting up the greensleeves of care

and realized that this manuscript was a hoax. This was some old Elizabethan play, as is shown by the word, *greensleeves*, which, as everyone knows, is an Elizabethan song. Bald Art turned to the last page; the final line, in a different hand and, therefore, probably by St. Padraic himself, was:

Nior fhan fupa na fapa aice
(There did not remain a word to say)

This was not an Elizabethan expression, Bald Art knew, for he was acquainted with the history of ideas. Then he formulated a theory which would revolutionize scholarship. And that was this one: that all the Elizabethan plays were translated from the Gaelic and had been written originally by Irish monks who loved Nature and Genealogy. Bald Art opened his copy of Matthew Arnold's essays, took up his pen, and began to write.

Three months later the book appeared in print; it had a wild and violent success, ranging from quiet, tasteful demonstrations at Harvard to rioting and parades through the streets of Dublin. Bald Art was made a Full Professor at once, and his wife felt that her Faith had been repaid. Everyone on the Faculty admired him immensely, especially his own department. The other professor who shared the office with Bald Art was heard to tell his wife that, although at one time he had thought Bald Art's wheels were coming off, they were screwed securely on again now. Bald Art received much mail during the following months, from publishers begging him to write books on anything at all and they would publish them, or from young instructors at other universities asking for guidance on spiritual and personal matters. Bald Art sat on his toadstool and edited mediaeval manuscripts.

The leprechauns are in their sitting in the Dublin Library watching, by their own devices, the success in which they have participated. They are happy and pleased, but Bryan O'Ryan is wondering why the other two are laughing to themselves.

"It do be seeming a grand thing, now," says Bryan O'Ryan, "that all his problems end, and from such a bit of a ruption as writing a book, when, after all, it is his talking that has the remarkable gift in it. Will he be writing more learned books on the blessed Gaelic now, from time to time?"

"Indeed, he will be doing that, darling," says Pat, roaring with laughter and slapping Mike on the back to emphasize the joke, "from this day forward until the Dublin Library crumbles into dust. Bald Art has altered the entire course of literary history."

The leprechauns are speechless with laughter, and Queen Elizabeth is spinning in her grave like a top.

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Most of us prefer to ignore the daily hob time *plays with the pattern of our lives. We readily overlook (perhaps wisely) the essential strangeness of such phenomena as time zones, the International Date Line and, oddest of all, that quirk of the calendar that permits an unfortunate few but one literal birthday for every four years of living. Such a victim of temporal vagary is the protagonist of Mr. McMorrow's unusual story: one whom time recompensed for the warping of his present with an unpleasantly detailed look at his future.*

Leap Year Day

by TOM McMORROW, JR

THIS HAPPENED BACK in the Fifties — 1952, to be precise.

Now don't turn the page — it has to do with the world of today, as well. I've known it all this time, but I never told it, because I didn't believe it. But I do now — and so will you, when you hear it.

Gavin was drunk when he told it to me — he was drunk a lot, those days — and it was such a wild yarn that even when parts of it began to come true I charged it up to dumb luck. But now — well, judge for yourself.

The name Gavin Mordecai usually comes up sooner or later when the newsreel gang sits around waiting for a winner on election night or Derby day. "A real weird case," the oldtimers will tell the kids, "here was a guy headed for the best, and better. And then — of course nobody knows exactly when it started, but —"

But I know. February 29, 1952, at 11:24 A.M. That close enough for you?

February 29, 1952 was the strangest and most terrible day of Gavin Mordecai's life. Which is a statement you'd frown at right at the beginning if you knew Gavin. Because you see it was his birthday.

Maybe you've heard that legend about people born on February 29. They don't fit in with the rest of us, because they joined us on a day that's not on the calendar most years. For four years they don't belong to Time, and then for one day Time belongs to them.

That's the legend. Of course it's just neurotic jabber, tea leaf stuff.

But you make up your own mind about it. Let's imagine that you're Gavin Mordecai, and let's follow you through that day.

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You're the makeup editor of one of the big newsreels — not Paramount, not Pathé, but just as legendary. No TV come-lately are you, Gavin. You've been a newsreel man for fifteen years, although you're only 32.

Nine years ago you were the boy genius of the business, taking over from old Ben Garberg as the youngest makeup editor the game had known since the crazy old Pathé Gazette days of 1909. And you weren't just special because you were young. A makeup editor has to deal with a lot of people, from cameramen to projectionists. And unless he's a regular guy, like Klein over at Paramount or Lawrenson at Movietone, he just doesn't last.

But you managed to last, and even flourish, which was quite a trick. Because you happen to be the biggest louse in the newsreel business.

There isn't a cutter or night desk man in the game who doesn't know how you eased old Ben out — but that's another story. This is the tale of February 29, 1952 — Leap Year Day.

This particular twenty-ninth of February fell on a Friday, which is to say a slow day in the business. The makeup gang came in, however, to work on a documentary reel that was being prepared as a prestige piece.

In spite of the date, Gavin was in no birthday mood. The home office had bounced a squawk back at him on the handling of a Must, and there wasn't a thing he could do about it. This particular Must involved the presentation of an industry award to the company's production chief. The home office felt it had been badly edited — which is another way of saying the chief's speech had been cut.

The reason Gavin had no comeback was that he hadn't been in that day, as he should have been. He'd been out promoting Gavin Mordecai instead of the reel, and one of the writers had handled the story for him.

At 9:15 A.M. he fired the writer, at 9:24 he stalked into the showroom and took his seat on the podium and at 9:26 he and the cutters were watching film.

At 10:30 the boys went out for a smoke, but Gavin passed it up. There was a Truman press conference scene he wanted to slip into this documentary. It was just a routine shot of the weekly mass interview, save that in this particular take one Gavin Mordecai could be seen, standing at the President's right and looking every inch the envied White House confidante who calls the old man Harry. The Washington crew had gotten him in that day as a favor and he had rewarded them by turning in one of the all-time great jobs of lens lousing.

If he could insert that shot and then make sure the right people saw it — who could say what it might mean for Gavin Mordecai? Because you see Gavin's ambitions extended far beyond this cramped newsreel office. Politics was his goal. You meet 'em all from the President down in this business, and if you use them right —

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That was always Gavin's approach.

He reached for the buzzer to get the projectionist on the ball — and at that moment the phone rang. He glanced at his watch. 10:31. Get rid of this call quick. He had only a few minutes before the others got back. Their professional contempt wouldn't stop him, but still he didn't like to feel it, coming through the words, the looks.

He spoke impatiently. "Hello!"

"Hello, showroom?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"This is the news desk. Did you get that film on Lindy yet?"

"Hah?"

"The early stuff on the water pageant. It ought to be up by now."

"Water pageant? There's nothing like that — what do you mean?"

"Well, I've got Chauncey on the wire. He's down at the Battery —"

"You've got *who*?"

"Chauncey. He says Lindy hasn't landed yet. Wait a minute. I'll put him through to you. Hello, Central —"

What kind of a crazy gag is this? thought Gavin Mordecai. Chauncey's been dead — let's see — how many years?

Then Chauncey was on the line. "Hello, showroom? This is Chauncey." It certainly was. There'd never be another gravel-gargler like him. "Gimme Ben, will ya?" he rasped.

"Ben?" said Gavin stupidly.

"Ben Garberg," Chauncey growled with the cameraman's quick exasperation, "Say, who is this, anyway?"

"Gavin . . . Gavin Mordecai."

"Never heard of ya. Look, when Ben gets back, tell him the parade hasn't started yet, so the stuff'll be a little late. Lindy just got off the boat. I was talking to Steve Early, that new Paramount contact man, and he says the cops are worried about this crowd. Biggest I've ever seen. I made some terrific eyemo stuff, but I may never get it out of here. Tell Ben, will ya?"

"But Ben's — just not here —"

"Okay, so he stepped out for a cigar — tell him when he gets back, is that so hard? My God, wake up, boy, this is 1927!"

The receiver banged. Gavin sat with the phone in his hand.

He heard the little window of the projection booth open. "Got that early stuff on Lindy. Want me to run it?"

"Why — why yes," he stammered automatically, "Run it." The lights went out and he sat in total blackness for a moment. Then the screen began to flicker and all of a sudden there was Lindy, the golden boy of the golden age, standing lanky in the prow of a boat,

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And Gavin Mordecai sat looking up with bulging eyes. But bulging or no, they were the eyes of a movie man, and they knew this was not 25-year-old film. This was brand new stock, fresh out of the can.

The screen went white and the lights came up. Gavin sat mummied for a moment. Then he leaped up, burst out into the corridor, tore open the door to the projection booth and stared up the steps at the silent black monster that makes pictures live.

The booth was empty.

Gavin wandered back into the showroom. Preposterous, of course. Some kind of involved prank staged by the boys. But that explanation was pretty watery. Because you only play pranks on people you like.

Obviously 1952 couldn't suddenly become 1927. There must be some sort of explanation —

The light began to flash on and off — the projectionist's signal that some film is ready. Gavin's hand went out to the buzzer with the habit synapse of nine years. Then after he had pressed it a chill splashed over him as he wondered what he was going to see.

Baseball players in a packed park signing autographs, posing menacingly with bats. New York players in gray. Chicago players in white. Banners flapping and bunting on the field boxes. A World Series, evidently.

A roll of crowd shots, then a roll of closeups showing pitchers peering down for signs, batters squinting out at the mound, all to be cut into the game coverage. He recognized Lou Gehrig, and of course that was Babe Ruth, winking and mugging. Yankees and Cubs.

Now the game, flashing jerkily from pitch to pitch as the cameraman saved film between. And Ruth pointing to the center field bleachers, missing two and then slamming one to that very spot.

The roll ended and the lights went up.

"Some luck, we got that pointing shot!" cried a voice from above him. Morty was sticking his head out of the booth. But where was the bald dome, fuzzed with fringing gray? This Morty was one he did not know, grinning toothily under a thick black thatch.

"Y-yeah," Gavin quavered, "Some luck."

"Wanna see that political stuff?"

"Uh — sure." Crazy laughter bubbled inside him. "Say, Morty — wanna make a bet on the election?" For of course it was now 1932.

"I wouldn't take your money. Hoover's got it locked up again. Say, where's Ben?"

"He just stepped out." Gavin was catching on now, as a man in an asylum learns to humor the chuckleheads in the white coats.

Of course just as the man in the asylum would catch on faster his second

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trip, so Gavin Mordecai caught on faster than you and I would have. Because suddenly that memory from his eighth birthday was back, leaping into focus out of the soft haze of recollection.

The boy climbed on the bus, clutching his nickel, and his mouth dropped open as he stared at the driver. Dressed something like this Buck Rogers in the funnies, he was, only without the goldfish bowl over his head. And the people, big, like in the circus, and handsome looking.

But the clothes were the best. Although the windows of the bus were frosted with cold, everyone was wearing what the boy described later as "nightgowns with sleeves," filmily light and flowing. Around the waist was a wide belt with a dial, sort of, where the buckle should be.

They all looked at him curiously and murmured among themselves and one of them tried to talk to him, but being just eight he only lowered his eyes and wriggled.

Finally another Buck Rogers man got on, and the driver spoke and pointed to Gavin. The man looked surprised, then came toward him, smiling — and Gavin bolted past him and out the open door of the bus.

He ran home and told his parents about it and they scolded him, because he was a boy with a record for lying and cheating in little, childish ways. And being a child among grownups he didn't argue long, and as the years rolled his memory cataloged it as a dream, filed it away with the one about the painted Indian chasing him across a field the day he was four.

Now as the serene confidence of a young Franklin Roosevelt poured from the screen in a well-modulated stream, the door opened and Louie, the chief cutter, walked in. Gavin looked at him sharply to see what year he was. He was 1952.

Louie looked up at the screen. "What's this, Gav? How come you dug out this old stuff?"

"It's — it's a favor for the home office — they want it right away," Gavin improvised desperately, "Look, close the door, will you, Louie? From the outside. I won't need you for a while." He wasn't quite sure what was happening in the little room, but whatever it was, he didn't want anybody else getting in on it. That's the kind of chap Gavin Mordecai was.

Louie peered up at the screen again. "Say, that's a damn good-looking negative!"

"Yeah. Now will you close the door, Louie?"

Louie shrugged. "Sure. We got some work in the cutting room anyway."

Sudden terror gripped him. "Oh, say, Louie!"

Back in. "Yeah?"

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"Tell the projectionists to knock off. I'll — call 'em if I need 'em."

"Who's that in the booth now?"

"Why, that's — a home office man. Tell 'em quick, will you?"

"Okay, okay. Here they come up the hall now. They won't mind a bit."

Gavin shuddered and fell back. The consequences of Morty 1952 running into Morty 1932 were hard to imagine, but they would almost certainly have been disastrous, possibly causing the whole thing to go pop.

The Roosevelt speech was off now and Gavin just waited. No use trying to figure this phenomenon out. Clearly, it was apart from the usual scheme. Reason told him that this was 1952, but for today at least reason was obviously one with the gold standard.

He'd gotten flashes on his fourth and eighth birthdays — flashes that had obviously been no dreams. But never since. Maybe that was because you had to be alone to get the thing started, and you're hardly ever alone on a birthday. Well, if Time was feeling skittish, this was certainly the perfect setting for it — this sealed, soundproof chamber where the history of 25 years had passed in review and that of another 25 would likely march past before the plant became outmoded.

Light flashing. Press the buzzer. Blackness, and then the Hindenburg, settling slowly and then exploding into horrid flame. 1937. And suddenly Gavin was scrabbling through the papers before him for a pencil and some blank sheets. For he saw the pattern now, and he wanted to be ready.

Yes, he was right! Now he was watching the GI's staggering ashore at Oran — 1942 — that was it, all right. It was jumping ahead five years every five minutes, and if it continued —

Soon Al Hoisch of UCLA was gathering in a kickoff in his end zone and romping 103 yards through Illinois for a Rose Bowl record touchdown. Gavin had put this story together himself, and that day in 1947 came back sharp and clear.

Then it was today, and nothing was happening because he'd gotten rid of Louie and the projectionists.

Gavin sat with his pencil poised. This would be the making of him. This would be the difference, his edge on the world.

And so the parade of the future began. 1957 — and he blinked at the throbbing color that blazed at him. Of course. They had to, to keep pace with television.

War films. Soldiers in foreign helmets, ducking along, firing. Where? he wondered desperately. And then there was Tito, looking through field glasses, the once prosperous face tight-skinned and hard. Okay, but was it a world war? No, the next sequence proved, for there was a UN meeting, and there was a Russian delegate, walking out.

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Furiously Gavin jotted notes. This was it! He saw the career of his secret dreams opening up. He would bide his time a few years, then become a political analyst. The awesome accuracy of his predictions would shoot him to the top. Then politics, maybe Washington, maybe even —

Now a political story. The governor opening a new superhighway. Gavin scribbled away. Better and better! But who was that standing next to the governor? His secretary, the commentary said. He knew that face.

Gavin squinted at the screen for a moment. Then he laughed aloud. He ought to know the face — it was the writer he had just fired. He drew a line through the governor's name, smiling. One governor, more or less, was expendable. As a matter of fact, he was glad he'd seen it. Not only was he learning whose favor to curry, but whom to avoid. He'd waste no time on this one, with that punk at his ear.

The 1962 reel that he was permitted to see was strictly standard — floods in the midwest, a Mardi Gras parade, water-skiing from Florida. 1967 was better. He got some sweepstakes winners there. Maybe he could look them up ahead of time and buy their tickets? But no — there was the story, up there on the screen. He had already failed, because they were the winners, not he.

Olympic Games of 1972 in Rome, the torch borne from Mount Olympus to the ancient Coliseum. A whole reel devoted to dashing, leaping, diving. Gavin cursed in the darkness. Where, where was his philosopher's stone? It must be up there, somewhere.

Now it was 1977 and this had better be it. Since Time had gone back 25 revolutions, he was sure that at 25 years ahead was where the ride would end. In 1977 Gavin Mordecai would be 57 years old — at the peak of his career.

The lights flashed and here it was. Three-dimensional images leaped from the screen at him. It was the reel of January 21, 1977. Gary Peiffer, who had won 28 games for the Pirates and beaten Los Angeles twice in the World Series, voted National League's most valuable player. And there was old Commissioner Frick, looking more like Judge Landis every day, presenting the award.

Jonathan Shepard, captain of the moon rocket, paraded through the same Broadway ticker tape that had bathed another pilot 50 years earlier. And President Fenimore Frome delivered his second inaugural address, thanking the people of Americanada for his record majority and promising to continue his sweeping reform program.

The screen flickered to blackness.

At 11:24 A.M. the door of the showroom opened and Gavin Mordecai came stumbling out. Louie was right in front of him, but Gavin bumped into him as you and I might a table in the dark. And without a word he

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hurried on, clumsy with fearful haste, down the long narrow corridor.

"Say, what's biting Gavin today?" Morty wanted to know.

"It's that home office Must that was loused up. You know he fired one of the writers this morning."

"Oh, yeah — and all the time it was his fault for goofing off. The guy was just trying to help him out."

"That's right. Well, you should have heard him lace into this guy. You know Gavin's never as right as when he's wrong. 'You got no brains,' he tells the guy, 'No talent, no future.' Just like that, in front of everybody. The poor slob practically crawled out."

"Which one was it?"

"That new one — you know, with the deep-set eyes."

"Fenimore Frome?"

"That's the guy. Boy, was that a scene. I'll tell you something, it's gonna take that Frome an awful long time to forget this day."

Gavin's secretary looked up, startled.

"You heard me, Miss Lacey. I said get that guy Frome on the phone." Of course it was ridiculous to be upset. Now that he was out of that showroom, the incident was assuming its proper proportions. A dream, nothing more. That punk Frome the President? Crazy! But no harm in playing safe. Might as well patch it up and get the guy back. It was like knocking wood. Nobody believes in it, but everybody does it.

Miss Lacey sat at the phone and listened for a minute that stretched like a rubber band. Then she hung up.

"He doesn't answer. Shall I —"

"Keep trying it," Gavin barked, "I don't care what else you do today, but get-that-guy-on-the-phone!"

"I'll do my best, sir," Miss Lacey replied stiffly.

"Don't do your best. Get him!"

He looked up at the clock. It was 11:32. Between that moment and 4:17 a lot of people who thought they knew Gavin found out they'd never even met him.

About 2 P.M. he fought with Louie, who'd never been known to utter a harsh word; fought so violently, in fact, that they didn't speak outside of business for months. By 3 Miss Lacey had enough and gave her two weeks' notice. At 3:20 he complained to the managing editor about the way the news department was covering stories, launching an interdepartmental war whose fury the old-timers still recall. At 4:15 the switchboard announced for the nineteenth time that Frome didn't answer.

And at 4:17 the phone call came.

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"It's Mike Brundin," said Miss Lacey.

Gavin just stared, as a prisoner will when the jailer, with a mumbling chaplain at his elbow, says hoarsely, "*It's time.*"

"Mike . . . Brundin?" Gavin asked dully, as if he didn't know who Mike Brundin was, as if everybody in town didn't. *It can't be time! It's got to be a dream!*

He picked up the phone and said something.

"Hello, Gavin. Mike Brundin." *Yes, it's time. Let's go.*

"What — can I do for you, Mike?" *You still hope, even as you're passing through the little green door.*

"Well, Bradley's going to be helping me manage the campaign, you know, so the governor's going to need a new secretary . . ." *Has the prisoner any last words to say?*

"Fenimore Frome called me today — he's spoken to me before. I've read some of his political writing — it's good. We're taking him on, and I just wanted to tell you that it was he who came to us — I'm not stealing him from you."

You know you're finished, but you keep struggling even as they strap you in the chair.

"I know you wouldn't do that, Mike. As a matter of fact (deep breath) I'm very happy for him. I don't know what he says about me — (silence at the other end) — but — ah — I think he's a fine fellow. Why, if I told you the future I see for that boy . . . you just wouldn't believe me."

Coming . . . *in our next issue, on the stands in early May . . .*

CHILD BY CHRONOS, an extraordinary new twist on time travel (and sex) by Charles L. Harness;

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the latest of H. Nearing, Jr.'s stories, in which Professor Ransom combines military tactics with topology, and stories by James Blish, Ralph Robin, W. B. Ready and others.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

ANYONE CONCERNED with today's science fiction, either pro or con, will be equally concerned with the first comprehensive attempt at a critical valuation of what's going on in the field: Reginald Bretnor's MODERN SCIENCE FICTION: ITS MEANING AND ITS FUTURE (Coward-McCann). Devised for the general reader as well as for the critic, this symposium offers the wide-ranging, provocative, often mutually opposing opinions of magazine editors Anthony Boucher and John W. Campbell, Jr., writer-and-anthologist Fletcher Pratt, reviewer Don Fabun, poet Rosalie Moore and science fiction writers L. Sprague de Camp, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip Wylie and Gerald Heard. Editor Bretnor contributes a piece on the future of science fiction.

We freely admit that this book, so rich in information and so challenging in its assembled opinions, is a difficult one to judge with proper precision. The writing of these top-notch craftsmen is on a very high level throughout. The *thinking* is another matter. At the top of the graph is Arthur C. Clarke's brilliant and detailed study of early fictional space travel, Fletcher Pratt's performance as the devil's advocate as he totals up all the sins of technique committed by current authors of imaginative literature and Gerald Heard's complete destruction of the thesis of conflict between science and religion. The curve dips but slightly with John Campbell's discussion of the peculiar characteristics of science fiction and Don Fabun's sardonic exploration of the science fictional exploits of those media of "mass entertainment," the movies, radio and TV. De Camp's discussion of the creative imagination is generally sound but marred by poor organization and the occasional intrusion of authoritarian ideas of great dubiety. At the very bottom of the scale are Isaac Asimov's own interpretation of the flow of world history, an arrogant mishmash of absurdity and error, and Philip Wylie's frantic and undocumented argument that science fiction is the chief cause of all our ills.

To be viewed apart from the rest are the scholarly Miss Moore's stimulating appraisal of the relationship of science fiction to literature as a whole and Mr. Bretnor's plausible, if too solemn, discussion of future developments in the field.

Obviously, with such a group of rugged individualists at work, contradictions are to be expected, even at the top levels. To cite just one example:

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all contributors come up with a definition of science fiction and not one of them agrees precisely with one other. But that was to be expected. What is unexpected, and occasionally disappointing, is the too-serious and even messianic tone of some of the arguments. We wish it had been possible for Mr. Bretnor to enlist the services of Papa Schimmelhorn as associate editor.

But with all its solemnity and self-consciousness this is an important book, a landmark in its summation of the main stream of thought in contemporary science fiction.

We have been prophesying, on what seemed logical grounds, that the science-fantasy anthology was bound to become very soon a completely exhausted field; but we're beginning to be afraid that our prophecies may look about as foolish as that of the English critic who announced that the fictional detective "retires to limbo with the dodo" . . . in 1905.

The first eleven weeks of 1953 saw the publication of four anthologies of reasonably strict science fiction, two of mixed science fiction and fantasy, and two of purely supernatural stories; and much to our surprise, we are recommending all eight of these to you, and only regretting that space does not allow more detailed praise of each.

Leading the science fiction collections is Frederik Pohl's STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES (Ballantine), available both in paperback form and in an unusually inexpensive hardcover edition, and containing fifteen stories never before published in any form, representing most of the top names in the field at the height of their ability — in all, as welcome a bargain as you're apt to find in the year's crop. Andre Norton's SPACE SERVICE (World) is a collection of pure space-travel stories, studying the specialized professions of the interstellar future, including a few fine gems and many solidly professional pieces, all so well arranged as to add up to a stronger effect than that of any individual story. In WORLDS OF TOMORROW (Pellegrini & Cudahy) August Derleth aims at presenting off-trail "science fiction with a difference"; actually most of the stories are familiar enough in concept, but enough of them are so well executed that this ranks as Derleth's most rewarding anthology in some three years. The "with a difference" description would apply more aptly to Kendell Foster Crossen's FUTURE TENSE (Greenberg), a lively collection of definitely off-beat stories (half of them new to print) striking well away from the formulas of even the less conventional magazines.

Groff Conklin, hitherto a believer in stern segregation, allows a surprising (and to us, welcome) amount of straight fantasy to enter into his SCIENCE-FICTION ADVENTURES IN DIMENSION (Vanguard), and the result is as refreshingly imaginative a book as he's yet edited — illustrations of just about every conceivable variant on the themes of time travel and alternate uni-

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verses, including a number of hitherto unanthologized stories which must rank as classics. And in the mixed-anthology division, we call your attention, without comment, to the fact that Little, Brown has just published THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: SECOND SERIES, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas.

Two years ago we described Basil Davenport's GHOSTLY TALES TO BE TOLD as "an anthology distinguished by intelligently informative notes, by an impeccable selection of the finest (if also largely the most familiar) tales of pure horror, and above all by the editor's plea for the integration of modern stories into oral folklore — with suggestions on how *you* can do it." Precisely the same review can serve for Mr. Davenport's new TALES TO BE TOLD IN THE DARK (Dodd, Mead), which is more of the same and every bit as good, so well edited as to appeal even to the old hand who knows most of the stories. Cynthia Asquith's A BOOK OF MODERN GHOSTS (Scribner's) is more conventional and less modern than is implied by the title and the excellent analytical introduction by Elizabeth Bowen; but it presents twenty recent English ghost stories all new to anthologies, including a few of striking originality and literary skill.

The early 1953 crop of science fiction novels is recommended with reservations. John D. MacDonald's BALLROOM IN THE SKIES (Greenberg) is an admirably conceived suspense-melodrama with a fine new Fortean surprise, presented in unpolished first-draft form. Edgar Pangborn's WEST OF THE SUN (Doubleday) is intellectually impressive in its detailed creation of an alien planet and its races and in its study of human-alien interactions, but novelistically heavy-handed and dullish. Raymond F. Jones's THIS ISLAND EARTH (Shasta) becomes ultimately incredible in its galactic wildness (and offensive in its extreme labor-baiting), but starts off with some fine technological gadgetry (like better-written George O. Smith) and action-suspense of the Eric Frank Russell school.

We're afraid that the stories of the Viagens Interplanetarias have usually struck us as pretty routine work unworthy of L. Sprague de Camp; but devotees of the series will welcome the collected volume, THE CONTINENT MAKERS (Twayne). More than half of Daphne du Maurier's KISS ME AGAIN, STRANGER (Doubleday) is devoted to fantasy stories, some verging on science fiction; largely overlong and not too original, they're still interesting as marking the entry of yet another major name of general fiction into this specialized field — and the volume does include one fine story of psychological haunting, *The Apple Tree*.

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Once again Mr. Ley gives us the pleasant picture of Dr. Lasswitz — that surprisingly modern man — amiably satirizing the physics and metaphysics of his day. Slyly twisting the credo of Nineteenth Century materialism (the story was written in 1888) to suit his own iconoclastic purposes, Dr. Lasswitz proves beyond any possibility of doubt that supernatural (the term is absurd!) beings not only exist, but exist in strict obedience to scientific law.

Aladdin's Lamp

by KURD LASSWITZ

translated by Willy Ley

WE HAD RETIRED to the living room after dinner and Professor Alander went for the cigar box while our wives were already seated.

"Well," he said to my wife, continuing the conversation that had begun over the dessert, "which would you pick? The cloak of invisibility, or Dr. Faustus' mantle, or the bottomless purse of Fortunatus, or the apple from the Tree of Life. . . ."

"Dr. Faustus' mantle, of course," my wife replied without hesitation. "Then I could take all the trips I see advertised."

"And still be home for dinner," Professor Alander's young wife chimed in, smilingly. "This would fit your taste too, George, wouldn't it?"

"Quiet!" Alander said sternly. "I'm sure that *you* would pick the cloak of invisibility. To be there, but invisible, would be just the thing for you. And you," he turned to me, "hypochondriac that you are, you would want the apple from the Tree of Life. That leaves Fortunatus' big purse for me — just what I've always wanted."

"Your list of magical appurtenances is most incomplete," I replied. "Those limited qualities don't satisfy me at all. If I could reach into the warlock's grab bag I'd pick something that would grant me any wish."

"For goodness sake, no!" said Mrs. Alander and moved an inch or so away from me. "The nonsense you'd perpetrate!"

"You'd also be awfully unhappy," my wife said, "a man whose every whim is granted and who has nothing left to strive for . . ."

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"I don't agree with that," I replied. "In the first place I could rectify any foolishness . . ."

"In the second place," Professor Alander interrupted drily, "you could wish for the necessary brains first."

"And finally," I continued, "I did not mean to say that I want every fleeting thought to become reality at once. No, I'd pick some kind of apparatus which can be used only after some reflection; one, say, which makes a mighty but not omnipotent spirit my vassal — this alone would produce certain limitations — let's say I'd pick Aladdin's lamp."

"And then?" my hostess asked.

"Then I'd place the spirit at your disposal."

"Nice. I'll think about a few wishes."

Professor Alander had quietly risen and returned with something that had been half hidden under the papers of his desk. It was a very small antique lamp, made of copper and with strange decorations.

"Here's the lamp," he said, "now bring on the spirit, please."

My wife had reached for the lamp while he was speaking.

"What a rare piece. I have never seen this in your house before."

"It was offered to the Museum this morning; I haven't had time yet to look at it carefully myself. The lamp was found in the Tigris river, that much is sure. The documents are definite and genuine."

We looked at the lamp which my wife was still holding. "In the Tigris," she said, "but wasn't Baghdad on the Tigris and in Baghdad . . ."

"Stood Aladdin's palace," Alander finished for her. "But that lamp is evidently much older and moreover it is not of Arabic origin."

"That doesn't prove anything," I said. "As is well-known, Aladdin took the lamp, under orders from an African warlock, from a subterranean chamber where it may have been for many centuries."

"Let's rub it!" Mrs. Alander suggested enthusiastically.

"Helen! Don't! If you spoil the patina the lamp loses most of its value."

Mrs. Alander looked at her husband with perfect stage indignation. "What's the use of having Aladdin's lamp in the house if you are not permitted to rub it."

My wife had meanwhile discovered some lettering on the lamp which she pointed out to Professor Alander. He looked at it, muttered "Arabic," lighted the kerosene lamp and got a magnifying glass out of the drawer.

"If this is Aladdin's lamp I'll rub it, patina or no," Mrs. Alander announced. "Would you be afraid of the spirit?" she continued, turning to my wife.

Professor Alander looked up from his old inscription. "You act as if there really had been an Aladdin and a slave of the lamp. Don't exaggerate, now."

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"Oh, please!" I said. "My dear friend, you are really behind the times. True, until very recently all the traditional stories were disbelieved. But since the science of Transcendental Psychology has been established, the Society for Psychic Research has been founded and the magazine *Sphinx* come off the presses, well, indeed, — I mean, since we *know* that there are clairvoyants, spirit manifestations and doppelgängers and people whose astral bodies can travel long distances, ever since we know that, we know that the old stories are true. We know that Asclepius joined the head back to the body of the woman after having first cut it off more easily to remove a worm from her chest. Everything the ancients and the Middle Ages told about miracles and magic has wrongly been thought to be poetry or superstition. Nowadays we know that this all can be explained scientifically. Odysseus was actually in Hades and Dante was shown through Hell by Virgil. St. Anthony did preach in Montpellier at precisely the same time he was singing hymns in the cell of his cloister. There is no reason to disbelieve in Aladdin. All one has to do is to spend the necessary effort to explain the nature and the power of the spirit of the lamp by the methods of Transcendental Psychology."

Alander looked up and I had the feeling that he had not listened at all, at least not to the last portion of my exposition.

"Strange," he said, "do you know what it says here? The inscription is quite clear and legible. The top line says: *Aladdin of Baghdad*, and below, approximately, *No Believer must try what Allah has hidden here.*"

We were all suddenly very silent.

"The inscription is old," Alander explained, "it has been engraved in either the Twelfth or the Thirteenth Century. Most interesting, but of course, only a strange coincidence. There must have been thousands of people named Aladdin in Baghdad in the course of a few centuries. Possibly the inscription is a direct reference to the story which might be taken as proof that the story itself is much older than the version we happen to know. Maybe it was meant as a joke. Possibly it was done by a sharp trader who then tried to sell the lamp as the original to some not too bright customer. Most interesting, at any event."

"Don't you think we should at least try?"

"Helen, please!"

"But our friend here says that it can all be explained."

Alander laughed. "This I want to hear. Go ahead, philosopher of the spirit world."

"My first assertion is that the story of Aladdin and the lamp is not fiction, but is based on a fact of mystical existence. Of course, there might be some minor embellishments, but the nucleus of fact is easy to recognize. The

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story says, as you know, that an African warlock learns both of the existence of the lamp and of the fact that its possessor is the master of a powerful spirit. To get the lamp he needs the help of a young boy. Then, by sheer accident, the lamp remains in the possession of the boy who becomes great and prosperous.

"In the light of science the story acquires the following form: The African warlock is a man who can read Egyptian hieroglyphics and has learned about the lamp from an ancient papyrus. The fundamental questions now are: One, is it possible that there are spirits which can do things which seem to contradict the laws of Nature we know? Two, is it possible that the will of such a spirit can be chained to a simple implement such as this lamp? I shall answer my first question first. The fact that there are spirits has been certified by the belief of countless people in the past, from classical times on. Yes, we recently had a period when this was denied. But Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Pliny, Plotinus, Albertus Magnus, Thomasius Cantipratensis, Thomas Aquinas, Paracelsus, Luther, Kepler, Helmont, Swedenborg, Schopenhauer and Carlos von Prellheim, all the great men of all times have considered the supernatural. The fact, therefore, is established.

"It would be ridiculous to say that there cannot be any intelligences other than human. However, since they have other senses, they can establish contact with humans only under certain circumstances. Such spirits must be independent, not of the Laws of Nature, but of our perception of these laws. They might have means which we could not understand at all, like showing a savage a telescope, a locomotive or a telephone. As we transmit sound waves via electric currents to distant places so these spirits can transmit matter, maybe via electric currents, too. We might be able to do this within a few thousand years, they can do it now. That's the only difference.

"After all, what does the spirit of the lamp do? He fetches food, treasures, slaves; he removes the bridegroom of the khalif's daughter; he builds a palace in one night and transfers it to Africa and then back again. All this can be scientifically explained by the simple principle of teleportation of matter. This principle sounds strange to us merely because we are not used to it, but what is really unusual is the speed. We also build palaces and move buildings; that the spirit can do it much faster and over longer distances is merely a quantitative difference. The spirit just happens to have a higher cultural level. This also explains why he can transfer people. He is versed in the splitting off of the transcendental conscience and quickly organizes a second body elsewhere. This method has been known under the name of Mayava-Rupa in India since the oldest times.

"Now, having proved the possibility of the seeming magic acts on the part of the spirit . . ."

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"Please!"

". . . I proceed to the second question. Where did the spirit come from and how can he be chained to the lamp? I'll admit that I am too recent a convert to Transcendental Psychology to find the proper explanation at once; others may be able to do it better. However, as I understand the case the individuals of the spirit world form an ethical community; therefore the necessity for punishment of an individual may arise. Just as the transcendental 'I' organizes a human body in order to gather experience through incarnation, but is bound to the laws governing material bodies for the period of its incarnation, so an insufficiently ethical spirit may be bound to an implement, such as a ring or a lamp. Now implements are merely projections of the body's organs, they are, so to speak, organs of a lower order. That makes the punishment harder. The spirit does not have, in addition to his astral body, a protein body as we have, but a metal body. The rubbing of the lamp then is equivalent to the laying on of hands during hypnosis. The transcendental conscience is freed thereby, but the will is governed by the hypnotist.

"I am certain that Aladdin's spirit slave existed and unless his period of punishment is now over he must still be bound to the lamp. And since, as I don't doubt, this lamp here is the genuine lamp, I'm ready to prove empirically that the slave has to obey me."

"Wonderful!" Alander said, "This could be verbatim in the current issue of *Sphinx*. If I only felt sure that the spirit could replace the patina you would ruin."

"Too bad," my wife remarked. "It was so nice to imagine that this was Aladdin's lamp. But now that you have proved the case I'm sure it isn't so."

"Sorry, my dear. You lack the organ of scientific belief. But you, Mrs. Alander, you were born on a Sunday, you wouldn't doubt it."

"You know," Mrs. Alander remarked, "if I have to be completely honest I have to admit that I did not quite follow your learned discussion. I would have to see that in print. But I say that, if the story were true, the wizard would simply have gone for the lamp himself without telling Aladdin."

"Oh! And I thought I had explained everything. But your objection does not apply. In all mystical operations, experience has taught us, a medium is required and the wizard obviously knew that Aladdin was serviceable for the purpose. The burning of frankincense at the entrance also speaks for the fact that Aladdin was in a somnambulistic state when he took the lamp. How would he have been able, otherwise, to survive for three days without food?"

"Incidentally, what happened to the lamp after Aladdin's death?"

"He probably threw it into the Tigris himself, to prevent misuse."

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"And how," Alander wanted to know, "do you explain the existence of the subterranean chamber and the lamp therein?"

I hesitated for a moment. "I could just say that this happens to be a historical fact which we have to accept as such. But it is all perfectly clear even from the theoretical point of view. Just as a plant cannot grow without soil, and just as a transcendental spirit cannot organize his human body from thin air, but needs a womb, so the metal body of the lamp could come into existence only in a suitable environment. Most probably there was a transcendental jewelry workshop underground. The mention of fruit of rare gemstones speaks in favor of this assumption. And the Egyptian papyrus which revealed the existence of this place to the magician was most likely an ancient clairvoyant geological map."

"Impossible to catch you," said the Professor. "Now here is a spot which is damaged anyway. Go ahead and try. I'm curious."

I slowly reached for the lamp. Everybody was very quiet and I hesitated a bit. Isn't it blasphemous to try to lift the veil of Isis which hides the kingdom of the spirits? And did not such an attempt expose all present to an unknown danger?

But I had to prove a scientific fact. And even if the spirit had meanwhile been released and only his empty metal body was left with us then failure would at least prove that fact. I rubbed the lamp gently. Nothing happened.

"Maybe the lamp has to burn," my wife remarked.

"The story says nothing about that. But maybe I have to hold it in one hand and rub with the other — Don't you hear anything?"

"No — Yes — Maybe."

There was no doubt now, a grating sound came from the lamp.

"That spirit is rusty," remarked Alander.

"Sh! Quiet. A voice."

Alander suddenly listened intently.

"He speaks in Arabic."

"Spirit of the Lamp. Speak English!"

The voice was faint, but clear: "I am the spirit of the lamp and ready to serve those who are the masters of the lamp."

"Where are you?"

"In the lamp."

"Why don't you show yourself?"

"I am not permitted. As soon as I materialize so that I can be perceived by all human senses I am subject to the laws of nature and the laws of society which are accepted in that time. Since slavery is outlawed in modern society my incarnation would automatically free me. Therefore I am bound to communicate only acoustically."

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"What? The spirit's realm is progressing too?"

"We are subject to the necessity of adaptation."

"But you can fulfill my wishes?"

"I can do anything which does not contradict natural law."

"Make a wish," I said to the ladies, but they sat quietly, exchanging glances. It was Alander who spoke first.

"That spirit seems to be highly civilized. Let's see whether he is genuine. Make him put $100,000 in gold on the table."

"Slave of the Lamp. You heard the order. Bring $100,000 in gold."

"I can't, lord. It is against the laws."

"Why?"

"All minted gold, no matter what coinage, belongs to somebody. I am not permitted to steal."

"Then create gold nuggets."

"This would be against the law of the conservation of matter."

"Get it out of the ground."

"I am unable to do that. This would require more mechanical energy than is stored in my present body."

"Vile slave! You did bring gold to Aladdin."

"Yes, but at that time the laws of the conservation of matter and of energy was still unknown. The natural laws are nothing but the expression of scientific perception of a given period. In my transcendental conscience I'm independent of these laws, but working in your time such actions would undermine the conditions which are pillars of your culture."

"Your spirit is bright, ten times brighter than all you Transcendental Psychologists. Ask him something that we haven't discovered yet."

"Slave of the Lamp. What is the nature of gravity?"

"I can't tell that. If a human learned that today it would be against the law of continuous development of the natural sciences."

"He's good. Let him go."

"Oh, no," the women cried, in unison, "now we want to make a wish."

"Please do!" I said, somewhat unhappily. "I hope it will do some good."

"Tell him that he is to take us to the shore of the Gulf of Naples."

"Slave of the Lamp. You heard my wife's order. Obey it."

"Lord, this is against the laws of mechanics."

"Put us into a somnambulistic condition and take our astral bodies there."

"Formerly I could do anything, because anything was believed possible. Now I can separate the astral body only with people who have the proper constitution. But none of the persons present has mediumistic tendencies."

"Too bad," said my wife. "I'll probably never get to see Italy."

"Your spirit," Alander observed, "does not seem to agree with you any

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too well. You look wilted. You should have picked the apple from the Tree of Life. Well, Helen, it's your turn now."

Mrs. Alander leaned her elbow on the table and thoughtfully pulled her bangs. "He can't bring us money, he can't tell us anything, he can't take us on a trip. All he can do is annoy us. Maybe he can get the Elixir of Life."

"Slave! Bring the Elixir of Life."

"Lord, there is no such thing. Medical science has specialized."

Mrs. Alander's elbow brushed against a pencil which dropped to the floor. "I wish that thing would not fall," she muttered.

"Slave! You heard, obey!"

"Lord, there is nothing I can do against the law of gravity."

"Devil! What *can* you do?"

"Anything that does not violate a law existing in the time I am ordered to act. But I shall be free if my master has no longer any orders for me."

"At least pick up that pencil."

"Forgive me, lord, even that is impossible."

"Why?"

"According to the laws of the universe, the existence of which is assumed by modern science, your muscles have to do 916.11 kilogram meters of work today. If I relieved you of only 5 per cent of that work there would be an energy surplus in you which would be transformed into mental work. You would write a long article about Transcendental Psychology because that requires only the veriest minimum of energy. The article would cause 26 readers to cancel their subscriptions, but one would read it so carefully that his copy, because the reader would fall asleep, would be ignited by his candle. That would set his house afire, a few other houses would catch fire too and finally an ammunition dump in that section of town would explode. The explosion would shift the mass center of the earth about the thousandth part of a millimeter and that would change both the rotational and the orbital period. You see that the consequences are too formidable."

"Oh, learned spirit," I exclaimed loudly, "we do not deserve you, you are released."

I put the lamp on the table. A faint flash came from it and dissipated at the ceiling like a faint cloud. At least it looked that way to me. And I thought I heard a distant voice, thanking me for release after three millennia of imprisonment. "I flee into Transcendental Freedom from the Age of Necessity! Not a pencil can fall without reverberating throughout the galaxy."

I picked up the pencil and put it on the table. It rolled off again.

"You really should exploit your ability as a ventriloquist," said the Professor.

Some people will never be convinced.

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It will be obvious that Mr. Jimmon was a careful man who left nothing to chance. As he couldn't rely upon any friendly angels dropping in to warn him of his home town's zero hour, he made absolutely (and selfishly) certain he was all ready to go at the drop of a bomb. So, when the atom bomb did fall, when fire rained upon his city out of heaven, Mr. Jimmon embarked on his well-mapped exodus. Enforcing his superb novelistic talent with sharp awareness of modern psychology, Ward Moore has combined a theme from the earliest book of our culture's oldest Book with the (unhappily) dominant theme of the 1950's to draw a moving parallel between this Lot of a possible future and that one of a possible past. We would like to know more of the biblical Lot's later career in Zoar; Mr. Moore invokes in us a frightened curiosity about that future life of Mr. Jimmon — and his family — in the refuge of his choice.

Lot

by WARD MOORE

MR. JIMMON even appeared elated, like a man about to set out on a vacation.

"Well folks, no use waiting any longer. We're all set. So let's go."

There was a betrayal here; Mr. Jimmon was not the kind of man who addressed his family as "folks."

"David, you're sure . . . ?"

Mr. Jimmon merely smiled. This was quite out of character; customarily he reacted to his wife's habit of posing unfinished questions — after seventeen years the unuttered and larger part of the queries were always instantly known to him in some mysterious way, as though unerringly projected by the key in which the introduction was pitched, so that not only the full wording was communicated to his mind, but the shades and implications which circumstance and humor attached to them — with sharp and querulous defense. No matter how often he resolved to stare quietly or use the still more effective, Afraid I didn't catch your meaning, dear, he had never been able to put his resolution into force. Until this moment of crisis. Crisis, reflected Mr. Jimmon, still smiling and moving suggestively toward the door, crisis changes people. Brings out underlying qualities.

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It was Jir who answered Molly Jimmon, with the adolescent's half-whine of exasperation. "Aw furcrysay Mom, what's the idea? The highways'll be clogged tight. What's the good figuring out everything heada time and having everything all set if you're going to start all over again at the last minute? Get a grip on yourself and let's go."

Mr. Jimmon did not voice the reflexive, That's no way to talk to your Mother. Instead he thought, not unsympathetically, of woman's slow reaction time. Asset in childbirth, liability behind the wheel. He knew Molly was thinking of the house and all the things in it: her clothes and Erika's, the TV set — so sullenly ugly now, with the electricity gone — the refrigerator in which the food would soon begin to rot and stink, the dead stove, the cellarful of cases of canned stuff for which there was no room in the station wagon. And the Buick, blocked up in the garage, with the air thoughtfully let out of the tires and the battery hidden.

Of course the house would be looted. But they had known that all along. When they — or rather he, for it was his executive's mind and training which were responsible for the Jimmons' preparation against this moment — planned so carefully and providentially, he had weighed property against life and decided on life. No other decision was possible.

"Aren't you at least going to phone Pearl and Dan?"

Now why in the world, thought Mr. Jimmon, completely above petty irritation, should I call Dan Davisson? (Because of course it's *Dan* she means — My Old Beau. Oh, he was nobody then, just an impractical dreamer without a penny to his name; it wasn't for years that he was recognized as a Mathematical Genius; now he's a professor and all sorts of things — but she automatically says Pearl-and-Dan, not Dan.) What can Dan do with the square root of minus nothing to offset M equals whatever it is, at this moment? Or am I supposed to ask if Pearl has all her diamonds? Query, why doesn't Pearl wear pearls? Only diamonds? My wife's friends, heh heh, but even the subtlest intonation won't label them when you're entertaining an important client and Pearl and Dan.

And why should *I*? What sudden paralysis afflicts her? Hysteria?

"No," said Mr. Jimmon.

Then he added, relenting, "Phone's been out since."

"But," said Molly.

She's hardly going to ask me to drive into town. He selected several answers in readiness. But she merely looked toward the telephone helplessly (she ought to have been fat, thought Mr. Jimmon, really she should, or anyway plump; her thinness gives her that air of competence, or at least *attempt*), so he amplified gently, "They're unquestionably all right. As far away from It as we are."

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Wendell was already in the station wagon. With Waggie hidden somewhere. Should have sent the dog to the humane society; more merciful to have it put to sleep. Too late now; Waggie would have to take his chance. There were plenty of rabbits in the hills above Malibu, he had often seen them quite close to the house. At all events there was no room for a dog in the wagon, already loaded within a pound of its capacity.

Erika came in briskly from the kitchen, her brown jodhpurs making her appear at first glance even younger than fourteen. But only at first glance; then the swell of hips and breast denied the childishness the jodhpurs seemed to accent.

"The water's gone, Mom. There's no use sticking around any longer."

Molly looked incredulous. "The water?"

"Of course the water's gone," said Mr. Jimmon, not impatiently, but rather with satisfaction in his own foresight. "If It didn't get the aqueduct, the mains depend on pumps. Electric pumps. When the electricity went, the water went too."

"But the water," repeated Molly, as though this last catastrophe was beyond all reason — even the outrageous logic which It brought in its train.

Jir slouched past them and outside. Erika tucked in a strand of hair, pulled her jockey cap downward and sideways, glanced quickly at her mother and father, then followed. Molly took several steps, paused, smiled vaguely in the mirror and walked out of the house.

Mr. Jimmon patted his pockets; the money was all there. He didn't even look back before closing the front door and rattling the knob to be sure the lock had caught. It had never failed, but Mr. Jimmon always rattled it anyway. He strode to the station wagon, running his eye over the springs to reassure himself again that they really hadn't overloaded it.

The sky was overcast; you might have thought it one of the regular morning high fogs if you didn't know. Mr. Jimmon faced southeast, but It had been too far away to see anything now. Erika and Molly were in the front seat; the boys were in the back, lost amid the neatly packed stuff. He opened the door on the driver's side, got in, turned the key and started the motor. Then he said casually over his shoulder, "Put the dog out, Jir."

Wendell protested, too quickly, "Waggie's not here."

Molly exclaimed, "Oh David . . . ."

Mr. Jimmon said patiently, "We're losing pretty valuable time. There's no room for the dog; we have no food for him. If we had room we could have taken more essentials; those few pounds might mean the difference."

"Can't find him," muttered Jir.

"He's not here. I tell you he's not here," shouted Wendell, tearful voiced.

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"If I have to stop the motor and get him myself we'll be wasting still more time and gas." Mr. Jimmon was still detached, judicial. "This isn't a matter of kindness to animals. It's life and death."

Erika said evenly, "Dad's right, you know. It's the dog or us. Put him out, Wend."

"I tell you —" Wendell began.

"Got him!" exclaimed Jir. "OK, Waggie! Outside and good luck."

The spaniel wriggled ecstatically as he was picked up and put out through the open window. Mr. Jimmon raced the motor, but it didn't drown out Wendell's anguish. He threw himself on his brother, hitting and kicking. Mr. Jimmon took his foot off the gas, and as soon as he was sure the dog was away from the wheels, eased the station wagon out of the driveway and down the hill toward the ocean.

"Wendell, Wendell, stop," pleaded Molly. "Don't hurt him, Jir."

Mr. Jimmon clicked on the radio. After a preliminary hum, clashing static crackled out. He pushed all five buttons in turn, varying the quality of unintelligible sound. "Want me to try?" offered Erika. She pushed the manual button and turned the knob slowly. Music dripped out.

Mr. Jimmon grunted. "Mexican station. Try something else. Maybe you can get Ventura."

They rounded a tight curve. "Isn't that the Warbinn's?" asked Molly.

For the first time since It happened Mr. Jimmon had a twinge of impatience. There was no possibility, even with the unreliable eye of shocked excitement, of mistaking the Warbinn's blue Mercury. No one else on Rambla Catalina had one anything like it, and visitors would be most unlikely now. If Molly would apply the most elementary logic!

Besides, Warbinn had stopped the blue Mercury in the Jimmon driveway five times every week for the past two months — ever since they had decided to put the Buick up and keep the wagon packed and ready against this moment — for Mr. Jimmon to ride with him to the city. Of course it was the Warbinn's.

"*. . . advised not to impede the progress of the military. Adequate medical staffs are standing by at all hospitals. Local civilian defense units are taking all steps in accordance . . .*"

"Santa Barbara," remarked Jir, nodding at the radio with an expert's assurance.

Mr. Jimmon slowed, prepared to follow the Warbinns down to 101, but the Mercury halted and Mr. Jimmon turned out to pass it. Warbinn was driving and Sally was in the front seat with him; the back seat appeared empty except for a few things obviously hastily thrown in. No foresight, thought Mr. Jimmon.

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Warbinn waved his hand vigorously out the window and Sally shouted something.

". . . *panic will merely slow rescue efforts. Casualties are much smaller than originally reported.* . . ."

"How do they know?" asked Mr. Jimmon, waving politely at the Warbinns.

"Oh David, aren't you going to stop? They want something."

"Probably just to talk."

". . . *to retain every drop of water. Emergency power will be in operation shortly. There is no cause for undue alarm. General* . . ."

Through the rear-view mirror Mr. Jimmon saw the blue Mercury start after them. He had been right then, they only wanted to say something inconsequential. At a time like this.

At the junction with U.S. 101 five cars blocked Rambla Catalina. Mr. Jimmon set the handbrake, and steadying himself with the open door, stood tiptoe twistedly, trying to see over the cars ahead. 101 was solid with traffic which barely moved. On the southbound side of the divided highway a stream of vehicles flowed illegally north.

"Thought everybody was figured to go east," gibed Jir over the other side of the car.

Mr. Jimmon was not disturbed by his son's sarcasm. How right he'd been to rule out the trailer. Of course the bulk of the cars were headed eastward as he'd calculated; this sluggish mass was nothing compared with the countless ones which must now be blocking the roads to Pasadena, Alhambra, Garvey, Norwalk. Even the northbound refugees were undoubtedly taking 99 or regular 101 — the highway before them was really 101 Alternate — he had picked the most feasible exit.

The Warbinns drew up alongside. "Hurry didn't do you much good," shouted Warbinn, leaning forward to clear his wife's face.

Mr. Jimmon reached in and turned off the ignition. Gas was going to be precious. He smiled and shook his head at Warbinn; no use pointing out that he'd got the inside lane by passing the Mercury, with a better chance to seize the opening on the highway when it came. "Get in the car, Jir, and shut the door. Have to be ready when this breaks."

"If it ever does," said Molly. "All that rush and bustle. We might just as well . . ."

Mr. Jimmon was conscious of Warbinn's glowering at him and resolutely refused to turn his head. He pretended not to hear him yell, "Only wanted to tell you you forgot to pick up your bumper-jack. It's in front of our garage."

Mr. Jimmon's stomach felt empty. What if he had a flat now? Ruined,

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condemned. He knew a burning hate for Warbinn — incompetent borrower, bad neighbor, thoughtless, shiftless, criminal. He owed it to himself to leap from the station wagon and seize Warbinn by the throat. . . .

"What did he say, David? What is Mr. Warbinn saying?"

Then he remembered it was the jack from the Buick; the station wagon's was safely packed where he could get at it easily. Naturally he would never have started out on a trip like this without checking so essential an item. "Nothing," he said, "nothing at all."

". . . *plane dispatches indicate target was the Signal Hill area. Minor damage was done to Long Beach, Wilmington and San Pedro. All non-military air traffic warned from Mines Field . . .*"

The smash and crash of bumper and fender sounded familiarly on the highway. From his lookout station he couldn't see what had happened, but it was easy enough to reconstruct the impatient jerk forward that had caused it. Mr. Jimmon didn't exactly smile, but he allowed himself a faint quiver of internal satisfaction. A crash up ahead would make things worse, but a crash behind — and many of them were inevitable — must eventually create a gap.

Even as he thought this, the first car at the mouth of Rambla Catalina edged on to the shoulder of the highway. Mr. Jimmon slid back in and started the motor, inching ahead after the car in front, gradually leaving the still uncomfortable proximity of the Warbinns.

"Got to go to the toilet," announced Wendell abruptly.

"Didn't I tell you — ! Well, hurry up! Jir, keep the door open and pull him in if the car starts to move."

"I can't go here."

Mr. Jimmon restrained his impulse to snap, Hold it in then. Instead he said mildly, "This is a crisis, Wendell. No time for niceties. Hurry."

". . . *the flash was seen as far north as Ventura and as far south as Newport. An eyewitness who has just arrived by helicopter . . .*"

"That's what we should of had," remarked Jir. "You thought of everything except that."

"That's no way to speak to your father," admonished Molly.

"Aw heck, Mom, this is a crisis. No time for niceties."

"You're awful smart Jir," said Erika. "Big, tough, brutal mans."

"Go drown, brat," returned Jir, "your nose needs wiping."

"As a matter of record," Mr. Jimmon said calmly, "I thought of both plane and helicopter and decided against them."

"I can't go. Honest, I just can't go."

"Just relax, darling," advised Molly. "No one is looking."

". . . *fires reported in Compton, Lynwood, Southgate, Harbor City, Lomita*

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and other spots are now under control. Residents are advised not to attempt to travel on the overcrowded highways as they are much safer in their homes or places of employment. The civilian defense . . ."

The two cars ahead bumped forward. "Get in," shouted Mr. Jimmon.

He got the left front tire of the station wagon on the asphalt shoulder — the double lane of concrete was impossibly far ahead — only to be blocked by the packed procession. The clock on the dash said 11:04. Nearly five hours since It happened, and they were less than two miles from home. They could have done better walking. Or on horseback.

"*. . . all residents of the Los Angeles area are urged to remain calm. Local radio service will be restored in a matter of minutes, along with electricity and water. Reports of fifth column activities have been greatly exaggerated. The FBI has all known subversives under. . .*"

He reached over and shut it off. Then he edged a daring two inches further on the shoulder, almost grazing an aggressive Cadillac packed solid with cardboard cartons. On his left a Model A truck shivered and trembled. He knew, distantly and disapprovingly, that it belonged to two painters who called themselves man and wife. The truckbed was loaded high with household goods; poor, useless things no looter would bother to steal. In the cab the artists passed a quart beer bottle back and forth. The man waved it genially at him; Mr. Jimmon nodded discouragingly back.

The thermometer on the mirror showed 90. Hot all right. Of course if they ever got rolling. I'm thirsty, he thought; probably suggestion. If I hadn't seen the thermometer. Anyway I'm not going to paw around in back for the canteen. Forethought. Like the arms. He cleared his throat. "Remember there's an automatic in the glove compartment. If anyone tries to open the door on your side, use it."

"Oh, David, I. . . ."

Ah, humanity. Non-resistance. Gandhi. I've never shot at anything but a target. At a time like this. But they don't understand.

"I could use the rifle from back here," suggested Jir. "Can I, Dad?"

"I can reach the shotgun," said Wendell. "That's better at close range."

"Gee, you men are brave," jeered Erika. Mr. Jimmon said nothing; both shotgun and rifle were unloaded. Foresight again.

He caught the hiccupping pause in the traffic instantly, gratified at his smooth coordination. How far he could proceed on the shoulder before running into a culvert narrowing the highway to the concrete he didn't know. Probably not more than a mile at most, but at least he was off Rambla Catalina and on 101. He felt tremendously elated. Successful.

"Here we go!" He almost added, Hold on to your hats.

Of course the shoulder too was packed solid, and progress, even in low

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gear, was maddening. The gas consumption was something he did not want to think about; his pride in the way the needle of the gauge caressed the F shrunk. And gas would be hard to come by in spite of his pocketful of ration coupons. Black market.

"Mind if I try the radio again?" asked Erika, switching it on.

Mr. Jimmon, following the pattern of previous success, insinuated the left front tire on to the concrete, eliciting a disapproving squawk from the Pontiac alongside. ". . . *sector was quiet. Enemy losses are estimated* . . ."

"Can't you get something else?" asked Jir. "Something less dusty?"

"Wish we had TV in the car," observed Wendell. "Joe Tellifer's old man put a set in the backseat of their Chrysler."

"Dry up, squirt," said Jir. "Let the air out of your head."

"Jir!"

"Oh, Mom, don't pay attention! Don't you see that's what he wants?"

"Listen, brat, if you weren't a girl I'd spank you."

"You mean, if I wasn't your sister. You'd probably enjoy such childish sex-play with any other girl."

"Erika!"

Where do they learn it? marveled Mr. Jimmon. These progressive schools. Do you suppose . . . ?

He edged the front wheel further in exultantly, taking advantage of a momentary lapse of attention on the part of the Pontiac's driver. Unless the other went berserk with frustration and rammed into him, he practically had a cinch on a car-length of the concrete now.

"Here we go!" he gloried. "We're on our way."

"Aw, if I was driving we'd be halfway to Oxnard by now."

"Jir, that's no way to talk to your father."

Mr. Jimmon reflected dispassionately that Molly's ineffective admonitions only spurred Jir's sixteen-year-old brashness, already irritating enough in its own right. Indeed, if it were not for Molly, Jir might . . .

It was of course possible — here Mr. Jimmon braked just short of the convertible ahead — Jir wasn't just going through a "difficult" period (What was particularly difficult about it? he inquired, in the face of all the books Molly suggestively left around on the psychological problems of growth. The boy had everything he could possibly want!) but was the type who, in different circumstances drifted into, well, perhaps not exactly juvenile deliquency but.

". . . *in the Long Beach-Wilmington-San Pedro area. Comparison with that which occurred at Pittsburgh reveal that this morning's was in every way less serious. All fires are now under control and all the injured are now receiving medical attention* . . ."

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"I don't think they're telling the truth," stated Mrs. Jimmon.

He snorted. He didn't think so either, but by what process had she arrived at that conclusion?

"I want to hear the ball game. Turn on the ball game, Rick," Wendell demanded.

Eleven sixteen, and rolling northward on the highway. Not bad, not bad at all. Foresight. Now if he could only edge his way leftward to the southbound strip they'd be beyond the Santa Barbara bottleneck by 2 o'clock.

"The lights," exclaimed Molly, "the faucets!"

Oh no, thought Mr. Jimmon, not that too. Out of the comic strips.

"Keep calm," advised Jir. "Electricity and water are both off — remember?"

"I'm not quite an imbecile yet, Jir. I'm quite aware everything went off. I was thinking of the time it went back on."

"Furcrysay, Mom, you worrying about next month's bills *now?*"

Mr. Jimmon, nudging the station wagon ever leftward, formed the sentence: You'd never worry about bills, young man, because you never have to pay them. Instead of saying it aloud, he formed another sentence: Molly, your talent for irrelevance amounts to genius. Both sentences gave him satisfaction.

Miraculously the traffic gathered speed briefly, and he took advantage of the spurt to get solidly in the left hand lane, right against the long island of concrete dividing the north from the southbound strips. "That's using the old bean, Dad," approved Wendell.

Whatever slight pleasure he might have felt in his son's approbation was overlaid with exasperation. Wendell, like Jir, was more Manville than Jimmon; they carried Molly's stamp on their faces and minds. Only Erika was a true Jimmon. Made in my own image, he thought pridelessly.

"I can't help but think it would have been at least courteous to get in touch with Pearl and Dan. At least *try*. And the Warbinns . . . ."

The gap in the concrete divider came sooner than he anticipated and he was on the comparatively unclogged southbound side. His foot went down on the accelerator and the station wagon grumbled earnestly ahead. For the first time Mr. Jimmon became aware how tightly he'd been gripping the wheel; how rigid the muscles in his arms, shoulders and neck had been. He relaxed partway as he adjusted to the speed of the cars ahead and the speedometer needle hung just below 45, but resentment against Molly (at least courteous), Jir (no time for niceties), and Wendell (got to go), rode up in the saliva under his tongue. Dependent. Helpless. Everything on him. Parasites.

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At intervals Erika switched on the radio. News was always promised immediately, but little was forthcoming, only vague, nervous attempts to minimize the extent of the disaster and soothe listeners with allusions to civilian defense, military activities on the ever advancing front, and comparison with the destruction of Pittsburgh, so vastly much worse than the comparatively harmless detonation at Los Angeles. Must be pretty bad, thought Mr. Jimmon; cripple the war effort. . . .

"I'm hungry," said Wendell.

Molly began stirring around, instructing Jir where to find the sandwiches. Mr. Jimmon thought grimly of how they'd have to adjust to the absence of civilized niceties: bread and mayonnaise and lunch meat. Live on rabbit, squirrel, abalone, fish. When Wendell got hungry he'd have to get his own food. Self-sufficiency. Hard and tough.

At Oxnard the snarled traffic slowed them to a crawl again. Beyond, the juncture with the main highway north kept them at the same infuriating pace. It was long after 2 when they reached Ventura, and Wendell, who had been fidgeting and jumping up and down in the seat for the past hour, proclaimed, "I'm tired of riding."

Mr. Jimmon set his lips. Molly suggested, ineffectually, "Why don't you lie down, dear?"

"Can't. Way this crate is packed, ain't room for a grasshopper."

"Verry funny. Verrrry funny," said Jir.

"Now Jir, leave him alone! He's just a little boy."

At Carpenteria the sun burst out. You might have thought it the regular dissipation of the fog, only it was almost time for the fog to come down again. Should he try the San Marcos Pass after Santa Barbara, or the longer, better way? Flexible plans, but. Wait and see.

It was 4 when they got to Santa Barbara and Mr. Jimmon faced concerted though unorganized rebellion. Wendell was screaming with stiffness and boredom; Jir remarked casually to no one in particular that Santa Barbara was the place they were going to beat the bottleneck oh yeh; Molly said, Stop at the first clean-looking gas station. Even Erika added, "Yes, Dad, you'll really have to stop."

Mr. Jimmon was appalled. With every second priceless and hordes of panic-stricken refugees pressing behind, they would rob him of all the precious gains he'd made by skill, daring, judgment. Stupidity and short-sightedness. Unbelievable. For their own silly comfort — good lord, did they think they had a monopoly on bodily weaknesses? He was cramped as they and wanted to go as badly. Time and space which could never be made up. Let them lose this half hour and it was quite likely they'd never get out of Santa Barbara.

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"If we lose a half hour now we'll never get out of here."

"Well, now, David, that wouldn't be utterly disastrous, would it? There are awfully nice hotels here and I'm sure it would be more comfortable for everyone than your idea of camping in the woods, hunting and fishing. . . ."

He turned off State; couldn't remember name of the parallel street, but surely less traffic. He controlled his temper, not heroically, but desperately. "May I ask how long you would propose to stay in one of these awfully nice hotels?"

"Why, until we could go home."

"My dear Molly. . . ." What could he say? My dear Molly, we are never going home, if you mean Malibu? Or: My dear Molly, you just don't understand what is happening?

The futility of trying to convey the clear picture in his mind. Or any picture. If she could not of herself see the endless mob pouring, pouring out of Los Angeles, searching frenziedly for escape and refuge, eating up the substance of the surrounding country in ever-widening circles, crowding, jam-packing, over-flowing every hotel, boarding-house, lodging or private home into which they could edge, agonizedly bidding up the price of everything until the chaos they brought with them was indistinguishable from the chaos they were fleeing — if she could not see all this instantly and automatically, she could not be brought to see it at all. Any more than the other aimless, planless, improvident fugitives could see it.

So, my dear Molly: nothing.

Silence gave consent only continued expostulation. "David, do you really mean you don't intend to stop at *all*?"

Was there any point in saying, Yes I do? He set his lips still more tightly and once more weighed San Marcos Pass against the coast route. Have to decide now.

"Why, the time we're waiting here, just waiting for the cars up ahead to move would be enough."

Could you call her stupid? He weighed the question slowly and justly, alert for the first jerk of the massed cars all around. Her reasoning was valid and logical if the laws of physics and geometry were suspended. (Was that right — physics and geometry? Body occupying two different positions at the same time?) It was the facts which were illogical — not Molly. She was just exasperating.

By the time they were halfway to Gaviota or Goleta — Mr. Jimmon could never tell them apart — foresight and relentless sternness began to pay off. Those who had left Los Angeles without preparation and in panic were dropping out or slowing down, to get gas or oil, repair tires, buy food, seek rest rooms. The station wagon was steadily forging ahead.

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He gambled on the old highway out of Santa Barbara. Any kind of obstruction would block its two lanes; if it didn't he would be beating the legions on the wider, straighter road. There were stretches now where he could hit 50; once he sped a happy half mile at 65.

Now the insubordination crackling all around gave indications of simultaneous explosion. "I really," began Molly, and then discarded this for a fresher, firmer start. "David, I don't understand how you can be so utterly selfish and inconsiderate."

Mr. Jimmon could feel the veins in his forehead begin to swell, but this was one of those rages that didn't show.

"But, Dad, would ten minutes ruin everything?" asked Erika.

"Monomania," muttered Jir. "Single track. Like Hitler."

"I want my dog," yelped Wendell. "Dirty old dog-killer."

"Did you ever hear of cumulative —" Erika had addressed him reasonably; surely he could make her understand? "Did you ever hear of cumulative. . . ." What was the word? Snowball rolling downhill was the image in his mind. "Oh, what's the use?"

The old road rejoined the new; again the station wagon was fitted into the traffic like parquetry. Mr. Jimmon, from an exultant, unfettered — almost — 65 was imprisoned in a treadmill set at 38. Keep calm; you can do nothing about it, he admonished himself. Need all your nervous energy. Must be wrecks up ahead. And then, with a return of satisfaction: If I hadn't used strategy back there we'd have been with those making 25. A starting-stopping 25.

"It's fantastic," exclaimed Molly. "I could almost believe Jir's right and you've lost your mind."

Mr. Jimmon smiled. This was the first time Molly had ever openly shown dis-loyalty before the children or sided with them in their presence. She was revealing herself. Under pressure. Not the pressure of events; her incredible attitude at Santa Barbara had demonstrated her incapacity to feel that. Just pressure against the bladder.

"No doubt those left behind can console their last moments with pride in their sanity." The sentence came out perfectly formed, with none of the annoying pauses or interpolated "ers" or "mmphs" which could, as he knew from unhappy experience, flaw the most crushing rejoinders.

"Oh, the end can always justify the means for those who want it that way."

"Don't they restrain people —"

"That's enough, Jir!"

Trust Molly to return quickly to fundamental hypocrisy; the automatic response — his mind felicitously grasped the phrase, conditioned reflex —

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to the customary stimulus. She had taken an explicit stand against his common sense, but her rigid code — honor thy father; iron rayon the wrong side; register and vote; avoid scenes; only white wine with fish; never re-hire a discharged servant — quickly substituted pattern for impulse. Seventeen years.

The road turned away from the ocean, squirmed inland and uphill for still slower miles; abruptly widened into a divided, four lane highway. Without hesitation Mr. Jimmon took the southbound side; for the first time since they had left Rambla Catalina his foot went down to the floorboards and with a sigh of relief the station wagon jumped into smooth, ecstatic speed.

Improvisation and strategy again. And, he acknowledged generously, the defiant example this morning of those who'd done the same thing in Malibu. Now, out of re-established habit the other cars kept to the northbound side even though there was nothing coming south. Timidity, routine, inertia. Pretty soon they would realize sheepishly that there was neither traffic nor traffic cops to keep them off, but it would be miles before they had another chance to cross over. By that time he would have reached the comparatively uncongested stretch.

"It's dangerous, David."

Obey the law. No smoking. Keep off the grass. Please adjust your clothes before leaving. Trespassers will be. Picking California wildflowers or shrubs is forbidden. Parking 45 min. Do not.

She hadn't put the protest in the more usual form of a question. Would that technique have been more irritating? *Is*n't it *dan*gerous, Day-vid? His calm conclusion: it didn't matter.

"No time for niceties," chirped Jir.

Mr. Jimmon tried to remember Jir as a baby. All the bad novels he had read in the days when he read anything except *Time* and the *New Yorker*, all the movies he'd seen before they had a TV set, always prescribed such retrospection as a specific for softening the present. If he could recall David Alonzo Jimmon, junior, at six months, helpless and lovable, it should make Jir more acceptable by discovering some faint traces of the one in the other.

But though he could recreate in detail the interminable, disgusting, trembling months of that initial pregnancy (had he really been afraid she would die?) he was completely unable to reconstruct the appearance of his firstborn before the age of . . . It must have been at 6 that Jir had taken his baby sister out for a walk and lost her. (Had Molly permitted it? He still didn't know for sure.) Erika hadn't been found for four hours.

The tidal screeching of sirens invaded and destroyed his thoughts. What

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the devil . . . ? His foot lifted from the gas pedal as he slewed obediently to the right, ingrained reverence surfacing at the sound.

"I told you it wasn't safe! Are you really trying to kill us all?"

Whipping over the rise ahead, a pair of motorcycles crackled. Behind them snapped a long line of assorted vehicles, fire-trucks and ambulances mostly, interspersed here and there with olive drab army equipment. The cavalcade flicked down the central white line, one wheel in each lane. Mr. Jimmon edged the station wagon as far over as he could; it still occupied too much room to permit the free passage of the onrush without compromise.

The knees and elbows of the motorcycle policemen stuck out widely, reminding Mr. Jimmon of grasshoppers. The one on the near side was headed straight for the station wagon's left front fender; for a moment Mr. Jimmon closed his eyes as he plotted the unswerving course, knifing through the crust-like steel, bouncing lightly on the tires, and continuing unperturbed. He opened them to see the other officer shoot past, mouth angrily open in his direction while the one straight ahead came to a skidding stop.

"Going to get it now," gloated Wendell.

An old-fashioned parent, one of the horrible examples held up to shuddering moderns like himself, would have reached back and relieved his tension by clouting Wendell across the mouth. Mr. Jimmon merely turned off the motor.

The cop was not indulging in the customary deliberate and ominous performance of slowly dismounting and striding toward his victim with ever more menacing steps. Instead he got off quickly and covered the few feet to Mr. Jimmon's window with unimpressive speed.

Heavy goggles concealed his eyes; dust and stubble covered his face. "Operator's license!"

Mr. Jimmon knew what he was saying, but the sirens and the continuous rustle of the convoy prevented the sound from coming through. Again the cop deviated from the established routine; he did not take the proffered license and examine it incredulously before drawing out his pad and pencil, but wrote the citation, glancing up and down from the card in Mr. Jimmon's hand.

Even so, the last of the vehicles — *San Jose F.D.* — passed before he handed the summons through the window to be signed. "Turn around, proceed in the proper direction," he ordered curtly, pocketing the pad and adjusting his jacket briskly.

Mr. Jimmon nodded. The officer hesitated, as though waiting for more. Mr. Jimmon said nothing.

"I said the policeman over his shoulder. "Turn around, proceed in the proper direction."

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He almost ran to his motorcycle, and roared off, twisting his head for a final stern frown as he passed, siren wailing. Mr. Jimmon watched him dwindle in the rearview mirror and then started the motor. "Gonna lose a lot more than you gained," commented Jir.

Mr. Jimmon gave a last glance in the mirror and moved ahead, shifting into second. "David!" exclaimed Molly horrified, "you're not turning around!"

"Observant," muttered Mr. Jimmon, between his teeth.

"Dad, you can't get away with it," Jir decided judicially.

Mr. Jimmon's answer was to press the accelerator down savagely. The empty highway stretched invitingly ahead; a few hundred yards to their right they could see the northbound lanes ant-clustered. The sudden motion stirred the traffic citation on his lap, floating it down to the floor. Erika leaned forward and picked it up.

"Throw it away," ordered Mr. Jimmon.

Molly gasped. "You're out of your mind."

"You're a fool," stated Mr. Jimmon calmly. "Why should I save that piece of paper?"

"Isn't what you told the cop." Jir was openly jeering now.

"I might as well have, if I'd wanted to waste conversation. I don't know why I was blessed with such a stupid family —"

"May be something in heredity after all."

If Jir had said it out loud, reflected Mr. Jimmon, it would have passed casually as normal domestic repartee, a little ill-natured perhaps, certainly callow and trite, but not especially provocative. Muttered, so that it was barely audible, it was an ultimate defiance. He had read that far back in pre-history, when the young males felt their strength, they sought to overthrow the rule of the Old Man and usurp his place. No doubt they uttered a preliminary growl or screech as challenge. They were not very bright, but they acted in a pattern; a pattern Jir was apparently following.

Refreshed by placing Jir in proper Neanderthal setting, Mr. Jimmon went
, "— none of you seem to have the slightest initiative or ability to grasp
ality. Tickets, cops, judges, juries mean nothing any more. There is no law
but the law of survival."
Aren't you being dramatic, David?" Molly's tone was deliberately aloof
to excited child.
ould hear you underline words, Dad," said Erika, but he felt there was
ce in her gibe.
mean we can do anything we want now? Shoot people? Steal cars
s?" asked Wendell.
David! You see?"

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Yes, I see. Better than you. Little savage. This is the pattern. What will Wendell — and the thousands of other Wendells (for it would be unjust to suppose Molly's genes and domestic influence unique) — be like after six months of anarchy? Or after six years?

Survivors, yes. And that will be about all: naked, primitive, ferocious, superstitious savages. Wendell can read and write (but not so fluently as I or any of our generation at his age); how long will he retain the tags and scraps of progressive schooling?

And Jir? Detachedly Mr. Jimmon foresaw the fate of Jir. Unlike Wendell who would adjust to the new conditions, Jir would go wild in another sense. His values were already set; they were those of television, high school dating, comic strips, law and order. Released from civilization, his brief future would be one of guilty rape and pillage until he fell victim to another youth or gang bent the same way. Molly would disintegrate and perish quickly. Erika . . .

The station wagon flashed along the comparatively unimpeded highway. Having passed the next crossover, there were now other vehicles on the southbound strip, but even on the northbound one, crowding had eased.

Furiously Mr. Jimmon determined to preserve the civilization in Erika. [He would teach her everything he knew (including the insurance business?)] . . . . ah, if he were some kind of scientist, now — not the Dan Davisson kind, whose abstract speculations seemed always to prepare the way for some new method of destruction, but the . . . Franklin? Jefferson? Watt? protect her night and day from the refugees who would be roaming the hills south of Monterey. The rifle ammunition, properly used — and he would see that no one but himself used it — would last years. After it was gone — presuming fragments and pieces of a suicidal world hadn't pulled itself miraculously together to offer a place to return to — there were the two hunting bows whose steel-tipped shafts could stop a man as easily as a deer or mountain lion. He remembered debating long, at the time he had first begun preparing for It, how many bows to order, measuring their weight and bulk against the other precious freight and deciding at last that two was the satisfactory minimum. It must have been in his subconscious mind all along that of the whole family Erika was the only other person who could be trusted with a bow.

"There will be," he spoke in calm and solemn tones, not to Wendell, whose question was now left long behind, floating on the gas-greasy air of a sloping valley growing with liveoaks, but to a larger, impalpable audience, "There will be others who will think that because there is no long law or law enforcement —"

"You're being simply fantastic!" She spoke more sharply than he

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ever heard her in front of the children. "Just because It happened to Los Angeles —"

"And Pittsburgh."

"All right. And Pittsburgh, doesn't mean that the whole United States has collapsed and everyone in the country is running frantically for safety."

"Yet," added Mr. Jimmon firmly, "Yet. Do you suppose they are going to stop with Los Angeles and Pittsburgh, and leave Gary and Seattle standing? Or even New York and Chicago? Or do you imagine Washington will beg for armistice terms while there is the least sign of organized life left in the country?"

"We'll wipe Them out first," insisted Jir in patriotic shock. Wendell backed him up with a machine gun "Brrrrr."

"Undoubtedly. But it will be the last gasp. At any rate it will be years, if at all in my lifetime, before stable communities are re-established —"

"David, you're raving."

"Re-established," he repeated. "So there will be many others who'll also feel that the dwindling of law and order is license to kill people and steal cars 'and things.' Naked force and cunning will be the only means of self-preservation. That was why I picked out a spot where I felt survival would be easiest; not only because of wood and water, game and fish, but because it's nowhere near the main highways, and so unlikely to be chosen by any great number."

"I wish you'd stop harping on that insane idea. You're just a little too old and flabby for pioneering. Even when you were younger you were hardly the rugged, outdoor type."

No, thought Mr. Jimmon, I was the sucker type. I would have gotten somewhere if I'd stayed in the bank, but like a bawd you pled your belly; the insurance business brought in the quick money for you to give up your job and have Jir and the proper home. If you'd got rid of it as I wanted. Flabby, *Flabby!* Do you think your scrawniness is so enticing?

Controlling himself, he said aloud, "We've been through all this. Months ago. It's not a question of physique, but of life."

"Nonsense. Perfect nonsense. Responsible people who really know Its effects . . . Maybe it was advisable to leave Malibu for a few days or even a few weeks. And perhaps it's wise to stay away from the larger cities. But a small town or village, or even one of those ranches where they take boarders —"

"Aw, Mom, you agreed. You know you did. What's the matter with you anyway? Why are you acting like a drip?"

"I want to go and shoot rabbits and bears like Dad said," insisted Wendell. Erika said nothing, but Mr. Jimmon felt he had her sympathy; the boys'

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agreement was specious. Wearily he debated going over the whole ground again, patiently pointing out that what Molly said might work in the Dakotas or the Great Smokies but was hardly operative anywhere within refugee range of the Pacific Coast. He had explained all this many times, including the almost certain impossibility of getting enough gasoline to take them into any of the reasonably safe areas; that was why they'd agreed on the region below Monterey, on California State Highway 1, as the only logical goal.

A solitary car decorously bound in the legal direction interrupted his thoughts. Either crazy or has mighty important business, he decided. The car honked disapprovingly as it passed, hugging the extreme right side of the road.

Passing through Buellton the clamor again rose for a pause at a filling station. He conceded inwardly that he could afford ten or fifteen minutes without strategic loss since by now they must be among the leaders of the exodus; ahead lay little more than the normal travel. However he had reached such a state of irritated frustration and consciousness of injustice that he was willing to endure unnecessary discomfort himself in order to inflict a longer delay on them. In fact it lessened his own suffering to know the delay was needless, that he was doing it, and that his action was a just — if inadequate — punishment.

"We'll stop this side of Santa Maria," he said. "I'll get gas there."

Mr. Jimmon knew triumph: his forethought, his calculations, his generalship had justified themselves. Barring unlikely mechanical failure — the station wagon was in perfect shape — or accident — and the greatest danger had certainly passed — escape was now practically assured. For the first time he permitted himself to realize how unreal, how romantic the whole project had been. As any attempt to evade the fate charted for the multitude must be. The docile mass perished; the headstrong (but intelligent) individual survived.

Along with triumph went an expansion of his prophetic vision of life after reaching their destination. He had purposely not taxed the cargo capacity of the wagon with transitional goods; there was no tent, canned luxuries, sleeping-bags, lanterns, candles or any of the paraphernalia of camping midway between the urban and nomadic life. Instead, besides the weapons, tackle and utensils, there was in miniature the List For Life On A Desert Island: shells and cartridges, lures, hooks, nets, gut, leaders, flint and steel, seeds, traps, needles and thread, government pamphlets on curing and tanning hides and the recognition of edible weeds and fungi, files, nails, a judicious stock of simple medicines. A pair of binoculars to spot intruders. No coffee, sugar, flour; they would begin living immediately as they would

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have to in a month or so in any case, on the old, half-forgotten human cunning.

"Cunning," he said aloud.

"What?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

"I still think you should have made an effort to reach Pearl and Dan."

"The telephone was dead, Mother."

"At the moment, Erika. You can hardly have forgotten how often the lines have been down before. And it never takes more than half an hour till they're working again."

"Mother, Dan Davisson is quite capable of looking after himself."

Mr. Jimmon shut out the rest of the conversation so completely he didn't know whether there was any more to it or not. He shut out the intense preoccupation with driving, with making speed, with calculating possible gains. In the core of his mind, quite detached from everything about him, he examined and marveled.

Erika. The cool, inflexible, adult tone. Almost indulgent, but so dispassionate as not to be. One might have expected her to be exasperated by Molly's silliness, to have answered impatiently, or not at all.

Mother. Never in his recollection had the children ever called her anything but Mom. The "Mother" implied — oh, it implied a multitude of things. An entirely new relationship, for one. A relationship of aloofness, of propriety without emotion. The ancient stump of the umbilical cord, black and shrivelled, had dropped off painlessly.

She had not bothered to argue about the telephone or point out the gulf between "before" and now. She had not even tried to touch Molly's deepening refusal of reality. She had been . . . *indulgent.*

Not "Uncle Dan," twitteringly imposed false avuncularity, but striking through it (and the façade of "Pearl and") and aside (when I was a child I . . . something . . . but now I have put aside childish things); the wealth of implicit assertion. Ah yes, Mother, we all know the pardonable weakness and vanity; we excuse you for your constant reminders, but Mother, with all deference, we refuse to be forced any longer to be parties to middle-age's nostalgic flirtatiousness. One could almost feel sorry for Molly.

. . . middle-age's nostalgic flirtatiousness . . .

. . . *nostalgic* . . .

Metaphorically Mr. Jimmon sat abruptly upright. The fact that he was already physically in this position made the transition, while invisible, no less emphatic. The nostalgic flirtatiousness of middle-age implied — might imply — memory of something more than mere coquetry. Molly and Dan. . . .

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It all fitted together so perfectly it was impossible to believe it untrue. The impecunious young lovers, equally devoted to Dan's genius, realizing marriage was out of the question (he had never denied Molly's shrewdness; as for Dan's impracticality, well, impracticality wasn't necessarily uniform or consistent. Dan had been practical enough to marry Pearl and Pearl's money) could have renounced. . . .

Or not renounced at all?

Mr. Jimmon smiled; the thought did not ruffle him. Cuckoo, cuckoo. How vulgar, how absurd. Suppose Jir were Dan's? A blessed thought.

Regretfully he conceded the insuperable obstacle of Molly's conventionality. Jir was the product of his own loins. But wasn't there an old superstition about the image in the woman's mind at the instant of conception? So, justly and rightly Jir was not his. Nor Wendy, for that matter. Only Erika, by some accident. Mr. Jimmon felt free and lighthearted.

"Get gas at the next station," he bulletined.

"The next one with a clean rest room," Molly corrected.

Invincible. The Earth-Mother, using men for her purposes: reproduction, clean restrooms, nourishment, objects of culpability, *Homes & Gardens*. The bank was my life; I could have gone far but: Why David — they pay you less than the janitor! It's ridiculous. And: I can't understand why you hesitate; it isn't as though it were a different type of work.

No, no different; just more profitable. Why didn't she tell Dan Davisson to become an accountant; that was the same type of work, just more profitable? Perhaps she had and Dan had simply been less befuddled. Or amenable. Or stronger in purpose? Mr. Jimmon probed his pride thoroughly and relentlessly without finding the faintest twinge of retrospective jealousy. Nothing like that mattered now. Nor, he admitted, had it for years.

Two close-peaked hills gulped the sun. He toyed with the idea of crossing over to the northbound side now that it was uncongested and there were occasional southbound cars. Before he could decide the divided highway ended.

"I hope you're not planning to spend the night in some horrible motel," said Molly. "I want a decent bath and a good dinner."

Spend the night. Bath. Dinner. Again calm sentences formed in his mind, but they were blown apart by the unbelievable, the monumental obtuseness of. How could you say, It is absolutely essential to drive till we get there? When there were no absolutes, no essentials in her concepts? My dear Molly, I.

"No," he said, switching on the lights.

Wendy, he knew, would be the next to kick up a fuss. Till he fell mercifully asleep. If he did. Jir was probably debating the relative excitements of driving all night and stopping in a strange town. His voice would soon be heard.

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The lights of the combination wayside store and filling-station burned inefficiently, illuminating the deteriorating false-front brightly and leaving the gas pumps in shadow. Swallowing regret at finally surrendering to mechanical and human need, and so losing the hardwon position; relaxing, even for a short while, the fierce initiative that had brought them through in the face of all probability, he pulled the station wagon alongside the pumps and shut off the motor. About halfway — the worst half, much the worst half — to their goal. Not bad.

Molly opened the door on her side with stiff dignity. "I certainly wouldn't call this a *clean* station." She waited for a moment, hand still on the window, as though expecting an answer.

"Crummy joint," exclaimed Wendell, clambering awkwardly out.

"Why not?" asked Jir. "No time for niceties." He brushed past his mother who was walking slowly into the shadows.

"Erika," began Mr. Jimmon, in a half-whisper.

"Yes, Dad?"

"Oh . . . never mind. Later."

He was not himself quite sure what he had wanted to say; what exclusive, urgent message he had to convey. For no particular reason he switched on the interior light and glanced at the packed orderliness of the wagon. Then he slid out from behind the wheel.

No sign of the attendant, but the place was certainly not closed. Not with the lights on and the hoses ready. He stretched, and walked slowly, savoring the comfortably painful uncramping of his muscles, toward the crude outhouse labelled MEN. Molly, he thought, must be furious.

When he returned, a man was leaning against the station wagon. "Fill it up with ethyl," said Mr. Jimmon pleasantly, "and check the oil and water."

The man made no move. "That'll be five bucks a gallon." Mr. Jimmon thought there was an uncertain tremor in his voice.

"Nonsense; I've plenty of ration coupons."

"OK." The nervousness was gone now, replaced by an ugly truculence. "Chew'm up and spit'm in your gas tank. See how far you can run on them."

The situation was not unanticipated. Indeed, Mr. Jimmon thought with satisfaction of how much worse it must be closer to Los Angeles; how much harder the gouger would be on later supplicants as his supply of gasoline dwindled. "Listen," he said, and there was reasonableness rather than anger in his voice, "we're not out of gas. I've got enough to get to Santa Maria, even to San Luis Obispo."

"OK. Go on then. Ain't stopping you."

"Listen. I understand your position. You have a right to make a profit in spite of government red tape."

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Nervousness returned to the man's speech. "Look, whyn't you go on? There's plenty other stations up ahead."

The reluctant bandit. Mr. Jimmon was entertained. He had fully intended to bargain, to offer $2 a gallon, even to threaten with the pistol in the glove compartment. Now it seemed mean and niggling even to protest. What good was money now? "All right," he said, "I'll pay you $5 a gallon."

Still the other made no move. "In advance."

For the first time Mr. Jimmon was annoyed; time was being wasted. "Just how can I pay you in advance when I don't know how many gallons it'll take to fill the tank?"

The man shrugged.

"Tell you what I'll do. I'll pay for each gallon as you pump it. In advance." He drew out a handful of bills; the bulk of his money was in his wallet, but he'd put the small bills in his pockets. He handed over a five. "Spill the first one on the ground or in a can if you've got one."

"How's that?"

Why should I tell him; give him ideas? As if he hadn't got them already. "Just call me eccentric," he said. "I don't want the first gallon from the pump. Why should you care? It's just five dollars more profit."

For a moment Mr. Jimmon thought the man was going to refuse, and he regarded his foresight with new reverence. Then he reached behind the pump and produced a flat-sided tin in which he inserted the flexible end of the hose. Mr. Jimmon handed over the bill, the man wound the handle round and back — it was an ancient gas pump such as Mr. Jimmon hadn't seen for years — and lifted the drooling hose from the can.

"Minute," said Mr. Jimmon.

He stuck two fingers quickly and delicately inside the nozzle and smelled them. Gas all right, not water. He held out a ten dollar bill. "Start filling."

Jir and Wendell appeared out of the shadows. "Can we stop at a town where there's a movie tonight?"

The handle turned, a cogtoothed rod crept up and retreated, gasoline gurgled into the tank. Movies, thought Mr. Jimmon, handing over another bill; movies, rest rooms, baths, restaurants. Gouge apprehensively lest a scene be made and propriety disturbed. In a surrealist daydream he saw Molly turning the crank, grinding him on the cogs, pouring his essence into insatiable Jir and Wendell. He held out $20.

Twelve gallons had been put in when Molly appeared. "You have a phone here?" he asked casually. Knowing the answer from the blue enamelled sign not quite lost among less sturdy ones advertising soft drinks and cigarettes.

"You want to call the cops?" He didn't pause in his pumping.

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"No. Know if the lines to L A" — Mr. Jimmon loathed the abbreviation — "are open yet?" He gave him another ten.

"How should I know?"

Mr. Jimmon beckoned his wife around the other side of the wagon, out of sight. Swiftly but casually he extracted the contents of his wallet. The 200-dollar bills made a fat lump. "Put this in your bag," he said. "Tell you why later. Meantime why don't you try and get Pearl and Dan on the phone? See if they're OK?"

He imagined the puzzled look on her face. "Go on," he urged. "We can spare a minute while he's checking the oil."

He thought there was a hint of uncertainty in Molly's walk as she went toward the store. Erika joined her brothers. The tank gulped; gasoline splashed on the concrete. "Guess that's it."

The man became suddenly brisk as he put up the hose, screwed the gascap back on. Mr. Jimmon had already disengaged the hood; the man offered the radiator a squirt of water, pulled up the oil gauge, wiped it, plunged it down, squinted at it under the light and said, "Oil's OK."

"All right," said Mr. Jimmon. "Get in Erika."

Some of the light shone directly on her face. Again he noted how mature and self-assured she looked. Erika would survive — and not as a savage either. The man started to wipe the windshield. "Oh, Jir," he said casually, "run in and see if your mother is getting her connection. Tell her we'll wait."

"Aw furcrysay, I don't see why I always —"

"And ask her to buy a couple of boxes of candybars if they've got them. Wendell, go with Jir, will you?"

He slid in behind the wheel and closed the door gently. The motor started with hardly a sound. As he put his foot on the clutch and shifted into low he thought Erika turned to him with a startled look. As the station wagon moved forward, he was sure of it.

"It's all right, Erika," said Mr. Jimmon, "I'll explain later."

He'd have lots of time to do it.

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Dana Lyon's fame has to date come from her extraordinary ability to terrify her audience, as in such films as HOUSE ON TELEGRAPH HILL *or such novels as* THE TENTACLES; *but do not look for the Lyon terror-magic here. This story marks a new departure in her writing, both in thinking and in style. The clown, it is conventionally stated, wants to play Hamlet; perhaps it is also true that a great interpreter of Richard III or Mr. Hyde inwardly envies Groucho Marx or Sid Caesar. Here is Mrs. Lyon's first fantasy story . . . and it turns out to be as bawdily uproarious as ever her realistic works were grimly chilling.*

Mr. Elsie Smith

by DANA LYON

"THIS TEARS IT!" cried Marlboro, and crashed his now empty coffee cup against the wall. He gazed in despair at the typewriter which had been his working companion for many years, and bitter regret welled up in him at the death (or at least fatal illness) of the old friend who had helped to make him successful. Elsie, as he called her (the only bit of whimsy he had ever allowed himself) was at last *hors de combat*. She had had gin spilled on her, and only sparkled the more; she had been doused with whisky and had come forth with amazing profundities; she had been dropped on her head on one occasion and was silent only until she could regain her equilibrium. But one cup of coffee — one little cup of coffee accidentally spilled on her — and she was through.

Marlboro was sweating. He lit a cigarette and paced the floor and called himself a damned blithering idiot for waxing sentimental over a typewriter. "That's what comes," he said bitterly to himself, "of not having children or dogs or cats or even a tame canary — you get tied up with a damn fool typewriter simply because you've spent ten years of your life with her and when she conks out you feel as if you'd lost your last friend." He was sweating in earnest now. Not only a friend was Elsie, but banker, too. He could remember, with a shudder, those early years of struggle on his previous typewriter, when he was doing little gems for the quarterlies, such as: "Azu fear of a strange plentitude filled his transcendental arterials with drippi agony. . . ." and occasionally he actually got a check for $10. Those n

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erable, horrible tenement-ridden years of non-success! And then Elsie — Elsie sitting so quietly and proudly in the pawnbroker's shop, waiting for the right owner. And Marlboro walking past, in despair because his 1910 Underwood had lost its *e* key and his typing came out (using *a* for the lost letter): "So sha swoonad undar tha raptura faaling as if sha wara in tuna with tha univarsa" — Marlboro, filled with gloom, saw Elsie and with the last of his dwindling resources, bought her (thriftily turning in his *e*-less typewriter as a down payment).

It was Elsie who brought him money, who made him famous and rich and free forever of his haunted past. For, still enthralled in those early days with the poetic creations that filled his thoughts, and determined, poverty or no, to express his dreams on the typewriter, he found that Elsie rebelled. When, his heart and mind (though not his stomach) filled to running over with the beauty of creation, he sat down before Elsie to express himself thus: "Her exquisite heart plowed under by the magnificent sacrificial explosion of hormones in the vast infinity of inexpressible impermanence, she sank to her couch in the outermost reaches of despair" — Elsie came out with: "Her heart beat with passion under the glowing globules of her exquisite breasts, her loins yearned for fulfillment, her lovely body, naked in its desires and fraught with fire, sank half-fainting onto the crassly occupied bed." And so Marlboro was made.

He could not understand it. At first he had despised Elsie and everything she stood for. He rebelled constantly at having his beautiful thoughts contaminated, his most exquisite dreams polluted by Elsie's mercenary determination to give forth literally with what he was so carefully trying to put into euphemisms. But Elsie was adamant. He made $50,000 on the first book she collaborated on, twice that on the next one, fabulous sums on each succeeding one . . . And now Elsie was done for.

He gave her a baleful glance as he passed her in his restless pacing. Done in by a cup of coffee. Lying down on the job. How the hell did she expect him to keep on dining on round steak at $1.20 a pound and gin at $5.00 a quart? First thing he knew he'd have to go back to chicken and beer, the way prices were now. And for his after-hours entertainment, he'd have to fall back on Third Avenue instead of Park . . . Hell, he was too old for that kind of poverty any more; he'd made his way up once and by God, he wore now, he'd do it again!

The next day he lugged home a brand new typewriter and sat down umphantly before it, never giving a glance to the now defunct Elsie, d before he knew it he had a page full of crap, thus: "Moonlight zoomed the hideousness of the triumvirated isosceles tentacles that dripped the moonless sky" — when, of course, what he was trying to say was:

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"As the soft moonless night swept over them they lay clasped in each other's arms beside the lapping waves of the lake, ripples of passion shattering them from head to toe, from breast to naked thigh." No use. Marlboro ripped the paper from the typewriter, crumpled it up into a ball and threw it at the late Elsie. He jammed on his Brooks Brothers $40 hat and went steaming out of his penthouse and down to the Third Avenue pawnshop where he had first laid eyes on Elsie. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps she had a sister . . .

The pawnshop had nothing to offer excepting a very lovely wraith of a lady who reminded him somewhat of pictures he had seen of Elinor Wylie, and who was also, apparently, on the look-out for a typewriter. She was saying wistfully to the proprietor, "But Mr. Crooke, surely you must have something as lovely as that other typewriter I got here, the one with the broken key, remember? It wrote me the most beautiful pieces — at least," (blushing) "I wrote them of course but they always seemed to come out better when I used that typewriter. So different from that horrid Mr. Smith."

"Mr. Smith?" said the proprietor. "Who dat?"

"The typewriter I used to have," she said, sighing. "I had the most beautiful ideas but on that typewriter they came out just simply horrid. All sex and — er — you know." She sighed again. "I made half a million dollars on Mr. Smith, but what's money, anyway? *Now* I can really express my beautiful thoughts."

Marlboro's heart was beating at the rate of 90 words a minute. "I beg your pardon," he said, removing his Brooks Bros., "but your words interest me strangely. You had a typewriter you called Mr. Smith, that wrote — er — commercial trash, let us say?"

She lifted her purple eyes to his. "I beg your pardon?" she said, her voice distant.

"Your typewriter," he blurted out. "Did you leave it here? I mean — well —"

Before he knew it they were both sitting in a booth at Dinty's with gin on the rocks, and Marlboro learned that her name was Loretta Raintree and that someone had stolen "Mr. Smith" and that she had never sold a word since. "But ah," she sighed, "so what? All my life I wanted to put down my beautiful thoughts and with my first typewriter I couldn't write at all and then when I got Mr. Smith all this frightful stuff came out that sold like mad and then someone stole Mr. Smith and I found this perfectly lovely typewriter at the pawnshop. Of course, its letter *e* was missing but that just inspired me with more lofty thoughts. In fact," and she dimpled prettily, "I wrote one whole book without a single *e* in it!"

"Not really!" breathed Marlboro. "And did you sell it?"

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She drew back, affronted. "Sell it!" she echoed coldly. "Certainly not. Who cares about *that?*"

Well, of course, it finally dawned on both of them that they were talking about the same typewriter except that Marlboro, being Marlboro, called it Elsie, and Loretta, being Loretta, called it Mr. Smith. And of course she had latched onto his *e*-less typewriter, which constituted a strong bond between them. "And now," she said sadly, "it's so old that *all* its teeth — keys, I mean — have fallen out and I am desolated. I fear that I shall never write so beautifully again."

"How much did you make last year?" Marlboro asked bluntly.

"Oh, a few paltry dollars," said Loretta, "but not, of course, writing. My art is worth more than all the gold in the land."

"Well, where did the dough come from, then?" Marlboro persisted.

Miss Loretta Raintree blushed and Marlboro did not pursue the subject.

"Where do you live?" he demanded, and she blushed again. "In a dear little hideaway called Kelly's Basement," she said. "Shall we go there?"

Marlboro shuddered. "I remember it," he said. "I lived there myself in the days before Elsie. No, let us go to my penthouse."

And so they went to his penthouse and Loretta gave the moribund typewriter a thorough going-over. "H'm," she pondered. "You said coffee was Mr. Smith's undoing?"

"Coffee," said Marlboro glumly. "Black."

"Black? Oh, that makes all the difference in the world. *Now* I know what's the matter with him! He isn't dead, he's just drunk."

"Drunk!" Marlboro exclaimed, rocked back on his heels. "On coffee?"

"Certainly," she said simply. "It's just a matter of reversal. Look at it this way. He reversed what both of us were trying to say when we wrote on him, didn't he? Filthy creature," she added disdainfully. "So naturally he works in a reversed way in all respects. Now, tell me this. When you, let us say," she added delicately, "take on a load of cognac, for example, what do you do to bring yourself out of it?"

"Why," said Marlboro, thinking, "coffee, I guess. Black."

"Exactly!" cried Miss Loretta Raintree triumphantly. "So Mr. Smith works in reverse, as I said." Whereupon she picked up one of the many numerous cognac flasks that decorated, like flowers, Marlboro's sumptuous quarters, and dumped it on the typewriter. "*Now* try him," she demanded.

Marlboro sat down, typed a few lines and came up with: "Passion rocked them like a hurricane in Florida, it tore at their vitals until they were fainting with the violence of their desires . . ."

"See?" said Loretta. "He's sober again. He only writes my kind of tripe when he's drunk."

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"You mean," cried Marlboro, delighted, "that she'll be as good as ever now?"

"Better," said Loretta coldly, "although how any decent, civilized man would be willing to consort with the type of thing Elsie Smith puts out —"

"That reminds me," said Marlboro. "Let's consort."

The strange thing about it all was this: As they lay clasped in each other's arms Marlboro, to his astonishment, found himself whispering, "My darling, your beauty is as crystalline in its purity as the dark fandangoes of the mystic universe . . ." While Loretta, in her turn, clasped him to her more tightly and in dulcet tones murmured, "Look, kid, let's cut the gaff and get on with it, shall we?"

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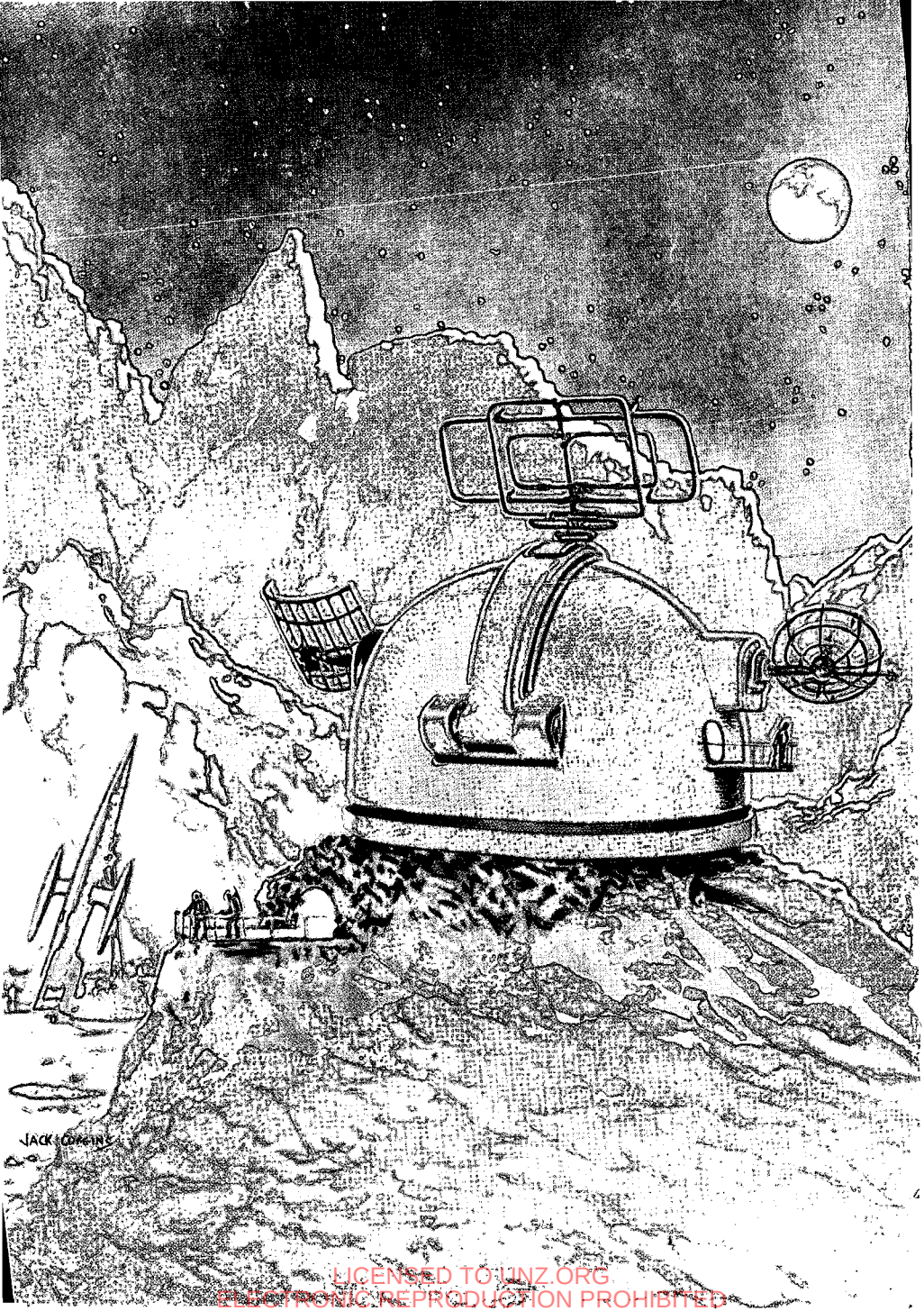

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